

53RD
Patterns
EDITION





PREFACE

The 53rd edition of Patterns magazine presents you, our readers, with the best in student creative work – poetry, prose, and visual arts – from St. Clair County Community College. Patterns is a juried publication, which means that panels of judges evaluate submissions and determine which works are worthy of inclusion. This is a “blind” process – with names excluded and each work standing only on its merits. After having been sifted by our panels of local volunteer judges (see the acknowledgments listing their names), this year’s visiting writers, Denise Duhamel and Margaret McMullan, have made the final determinations of winners in the genres of poetry, fiction, and essay. Their commentaries on the winners are to be found in the pages that follow. This year’s visiting artists, Zack Ostrowski and Thomas Pyrzewski, judged the visual arts submissions. In addition to our thanks to this year’s judges, we also thank the National Endowment for the Arts for its funding of Patterns and the visiting artists and writers program.



PROFESSOR DAVID KORFF

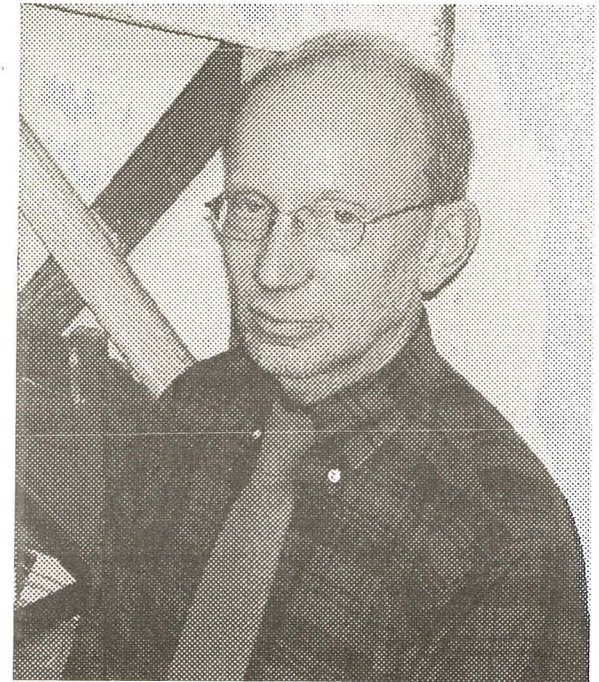
3

The 53rd edition of Patterns is dedicated to David Korff, who is retiring at the end of the 2010-11 academic year.

David has a bachelor of fine arts from the University of Buffalo in New York, a master of fine arts from Ohio University in Athens and a master of arts from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. He first came to the Blue Water Area to help create the art program at Lambton College in Sarnia, Ontario. After developing contacts at SC4, David came across the border. For many years David chaired the Visual and Performing Arts Department at SC4.

David's contributions to Patterns over the years are too numerous to mention. Year in, year out, he's played the leading role in piloting the Fine & Visual Arts portion of the magazine, including its layout and design. His annual slide show presentations featuring the student artists in each year's issue have come to be the part of the Patterns Reception that many of us look forward to most. Moreover, David's volunteer work for Friends of the Arts, as a long-standing member and sometimes chair of the board, has helped to ensure that funding and other important support for Patterns would be there to keep our more than half-century endeavor moving ahead.

With wishes for health and many happy years of retirement, we thank David for all he has done for Patterns.



Denise Duhamel's most recent poetry titles are *Ka-Ching!* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); *Two and Two* (Pittsburgh, 2005); *Mille et un Sentiments* (Firewheel, 2005); *Queen for a Day: Selected and New Poems* (Pittsburgh, 2001); and *The Star-Spangled Banner* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1999). A bilingual edition of her poems, *Afortunada de mí (Lucky Me)*, translated into Spanish by Dagmar Buchholz and David Gonzalez, was released with Bartleby Editores (Madrid) in 2008. She co-edited, with Maureen Seaton and David Trinidad, *Saints of Hysteria: A Half-Century of Collaborative American Poetry* (Soft Skull, 2007). Her collaborative projects include three volumes with Maureen Seaton and 237 More Reasons to Have Sex (with Sandy McIntosh) and *ABBA: The Poems with Amy Lemmon*. Ms. Duhamel's poetry has been anthologized widely, including eight editions of *The Best American Poetry*. A recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, she is an associate professor at Florida International University in Miami.

A recipient of a 2010 National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in literature, Margaret McMullan is the author of six award-winning novels, including *Sources of Light*, *In My Mother's House*, *Cashay*, and *When I Crossed No-Bob*, a 2008 Parents' Choice Silver Honor, a 2007 School Library Journal Best Book, an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, and a Booklist 2009 Best Book For Young Adults. Both *When I Crossed No-Bob* and *How I Found the Strong* won the Mississippi Arts and Letters Award for Best Fiction (in 2004 and 2008) and the Indiana Best Young Adult Book (in 2005 and 2008). *How I Found the Strong* also was named an ALA 2005 Notable Social Studies Book and a Booklist's Top Ten First Novel for Youth. Her work has appeared in *Glamour*, *Chicago Tribune*, *National Geographic for Kids*, *Southern Accents*, *TriQuarterly*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Other Voices*, *Boulevard*, *Ploughshares*, and *The Sun* among several other journals and anthologies such as *Christmas Stories from the South's Best Writers* and *Christmas Essays from the South's Best Writers*. A 2007 Eudora Welty Visiting Writer at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, she teaches at the University of Evansville in Evansville, Indiana, and at the Stony Brook Southampton Writers Conference in Southampton, New York. For fall 2010, she was a Fulbright professor of English at the University of Pécs in Pécs, Hungary.

Zack Ostrowski is a graduate of St. Clair County Community College. After finishing his degree here, he attended the College for Creative Studies in Detroit and earned a BFA. In 2009, he finished his MFA at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills. Since earning his BFA Zack has worked professionally as a graphic designer for Rossetti Architects in Southfield and as an entrepreneur, establishing and managing his own business, Superiorbelly LLC, which is multimedia art and design collective. He is an assistant professor of art, media and design at DePaul University in Chicago and a former SC4 adjunct instructor. His work professionally and academically has been recognized with a number of awards and honors, including a scholarship from the College for Creative Studies, an American Inhouse Design Award in 2008, and a Daimler Emerging Artist Award in 2009 through the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He has exhibited his work around Michigan and the world in such places as Shanghai University for Engineering Science—*Symbolic City* (2010); the Wating Room Gallery/Ultra Fair—*Fan Jam* (2010) in Tokyo, Japan; various shows at the Cranbrook Academy of Art between 2008 and 2010; at the DPI exhibition at California Polytechnic State University in 2007; and various other exhibitions around the United States and Michigan since 2003. Mr. Ostrowski has published his work in a variety of media, including print, television, and live recordings. As an artist, he has tried to tackle larger themes by mining personal narrative and posing it against cultural values and history. He says of his work that it "assimilates defamiliarization joined with the direct and accessible in order to produce a work...[that embraces] high and low culture."

VISITING ARTISTS AND AUTHORS

Thomas Pyrzewski received his BFA in Digital Cinema from the College for Creative Studies and his MFA in Sculpture from Wayne State University. He has been Adjunct Faculty in Sculpture at WSU since 2005 and Preparator at WSU's Elaine L. Jacob Gallery and Art Department Gallery 2007-09. He recently began serving as Interim Director of WSU's Art Galleries. Mr. Pyrzewski co-founded the artists' collaborative Superiorbelly in 1999. He received "Best of Show" at the College for Creative Studies' Alumni Exhibition at Center Galleries (ReVIEW, 2010), and one of 7 awards (667 submitting artists, with 80 selected for the exhibition) at the Michigan Fine Arts Competition at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center in 2009. His large-scale sculptures have been purchased throughout the country, featured in corporate firms, and included in numerous group shows, including at the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum (2008 Biennial) and the Detroit Artists Market (Insider exhibition, 2008, with work featured on the DAM website announcement for the show). He also had a solo exhibition at St. Clair County Community College's Fine Arts Galleries in 2007. His work also has been published, including in the nationwide "TrailBlazer" magazine. He also served as a guest Juror at the Habatat Gallery (38th Annual International Glass Exhibition 2010).

COMMENTS FROM ZACK OSTROWSKI AND TOM PYRZEWSKI

After a decade of collaborating on projects together, we have been provided with another opportunity to compare similarities and differences between our perceptions of the art making process. Our selection approaches varied, not in opinion, but in our constructive evaluations of artworks. Each of us had a different focus at the beginning of the jurying process: good craft and conscious use of design fundamentals; and complete concept with apparent process. We agree that context and content should coincide to complete a concept, and the artists' processes must be apparent and considered, whether they are technical, expressive, or both. As a result of our differences in fundamental priorities during the selection process, we feel that our final selection of student work showcases a refreshingly diverse approach to form making and a collection of works that draw equally from within and the surrounding environment. Our award-winning choices represent student work that has excelled in technical application, visual communication, and point of view. As alumni of St. Clair County Community College, we take pride in the effort that goes into all of the Patterns submissions and would like to formally thank the college for welcoming us back for this event. For us, SC4 has provided an academic environment that is inspiring, and we consider our relationship to the college a lifelong friendship with colleagues - including faculty, staff, and friends. During our jury process, we were intrigued by the diverse body of student work that demonstrates a high degree of potential. We are honored to be jurors for the 2011 Patterns magazine.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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7

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Patrick Sullivan
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Beverly Tansky
Sara E. Tallent
Charles Wright

AWARDED ART		ARTIST	TITLE	
Patrick Bourke Award		Robin Schwehofer		11
First Place		Lauren Cross	Cluttered Thoughts	12
Second Place		David Shagena	Apophysis	13
Third Place		Estelle Scheaffer	City Falling	14
AWARDED WRITING		AUTHOR	TITLE	
Eleanor Matthews Award		Nikki Roulo		17
<i>Poems</i>				
Blanche Redman Award		Nikki Roulo	Autumn	18
First Place		Nikki Roulo	To My Teachers, Past and Present	19
Second Place	Joanne Vandenabeele		He Doesn't Get It	20
<i>Short Story</i>				
Richard Colwell Award		Deborah Robinson	Tough Guys	21
First Place		Kristie Lynch	It's Not Always in Your Imagination	24
Second Place		Colleen Ryan	A Break for the Generations	30
<i>Essay</i>				
Kathleen Nickerson Award		Mick Goode	November 22nd 1980: The Day God Abdicated	34
First Place		Mick Goode	The Cedar Tree	38
Second Place		Justin Huffman	Death	40

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

	ARTIST	TITLE	
Art	Amanda Stuben	Ethereal Phantom	45
Art		Graceful Immolation	46
Art		Graceful Incipency	47
Art	Andi Manuilow	Not Wrapped Too Tight	48
Art	Brent Peever	Barnacles at Six Fathoms	47
Art	Andrew Jorde	Dissorientation	50
Art		Spotless	51
Art		The Outer Side	52
Art		Bullseye	53
Art	David Shagena	Oil and Water	54
Art		Facets	55
Art	Elisabeth Peters	Illiad	56
Art		Illiad	57
Art	Erica A. DeRue	In Depth	58
Art	Sheryl Penzien	Ring of Bright Water	59
Art	James Mitchell	The Old Shop	60
Art	Lauren Cross	Underwater Hauntings	61
Art	Jan Hall	Beneath the Gem	62
Art		Springtime	63
Art	Jenny Walker	The New Sheriff in Town	64
Art		Birds in Flight	65
Art	Justin Linne	Intrinsic	66
Art		Relevance	67
Art	Therese Padgham	Twilight	68
Art	Estelle Scheaffer	Lemons are Pink & Crabs are Blue	69
Art	Zachary Penzien	The Grapes are a Trap	70
Art		New Orleans	71
Art		New York	72
Art		Roswell	73

SELECTION OF MERIT WRITING

	ARTIST	TITLE	
	Chealse Bowers	Pink	77
	Darrin R. Rushing	A Summer Day	78
	Michael Fruhner	Sunset	81
	Zachary Ostin	Regret	82
	Lauren Cross	Shadows	86
		Iris	87
		Echo	88
	Adrienne Reamer	Tattooed	89
	Sabelyn Thorpe	Seventeen	90
	Karen Deschaine	Recycling Dilemmas	92
	John E. DaSharion Jr.	Coming Too Close	94
	Nikki Roulo	Witch Girl	96
		The Portal	98
	Zachary Ostin	Lust	99
	Darrin R. Rushing	Reflections of Renaissance	100
		Apple Pie	101
	Colleen Ryan	Addiction	102
		The Leftover Movement	103
	Rose King	Thomas Edison Statue	104
	Elizabeth Anderson	Wedding In A Park	105

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Awarded Art



PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual art disciplines and has been an advocate and emissary for "ART" at St. Clair County Community College. This year's recipient is Robin Schweihofer, who has been the Visual and Performing Arts Department design intern. In this capacity, he has been responsible for posters and visual marketing for Fine Arts Galleries, Symphonic Band Concerts, Noon Concert Series and all the Theatre Productions. Robin has worn a path between the student design lab and the college marketing office and the many faculty who are responsible for coordinating the productions in all of these disciplines. The Fine Arts Building has been a constant echo of "Wow! Have you seen Robin's new poster?"

Audiences and performers have collected his posters, and some day these will be known as the body of early design work by ROBIN SCHWEIHOFER.

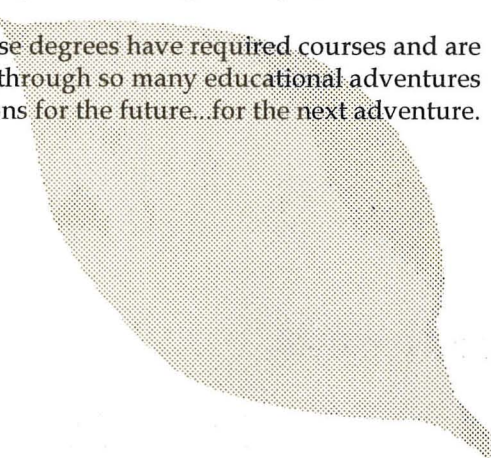
Robin came to the college to seek his fortune and to begin the adventure of discovering more about the world and particularly his world. When he looked at the vast schedule of classes offered each semester, he just smiled and said I'd like to try this and this and then ...oh so many choices. The visual arts and specifically the communications design program was a great place to start. But there was also music in the Fine Arts Building, and he likes to sing and he already played the guitar. And what about theatre? There were so many people walking around the building talking in accents, wearing costumes and enjoying a world of another time and place or through someone else's experiences. And those sets...all visual, color and 3-D Design and posters, and programs needing a graphic designer.

This was Robin's new world of discovery.

When he signed up for classes, he smiled. When he walked into classes, he smiled. When teachers asked questions and made suggestions, he smiled. And when he looks at his past and looks to his future, he smiles because life at St. Clair

County Community College has been an adventure. Robin has been sharing his college adventure when he goes to work at his full-time job. He shares his college adventure with his large extended family. And recently he has shared his musical adventure with his fellow students and the college faculty at various family restaurants in St. Clair County, where he plays acoustic guitar and sings...and yes, with a smile.

Robin has one more year at the college to finish his Associate Degree only because degrees have required courses and are not just awarded on how many courses a student takes. His sense of discovery through so many educational adventures will provide a very strong basis on which to make decisions for the future...for the next adventure.



Lauren Cross's black and white illustration appears deeply personal yet is stylized in a way that straddles the line between reality and myth. The two figures that appear united turn outward and reveal an internal complexity that mixes whimsical storybook depictions with culturally charged symbols. At first glance, the two silhouettes seem sublimely detailed, while a look beneath the beautifully fluid exterior uncovers a narrative deeply consumed with emotion. These inverted figures become fantastical internal landscapes, resulting in an accumulation that is both ethereal and intrepid in composition.



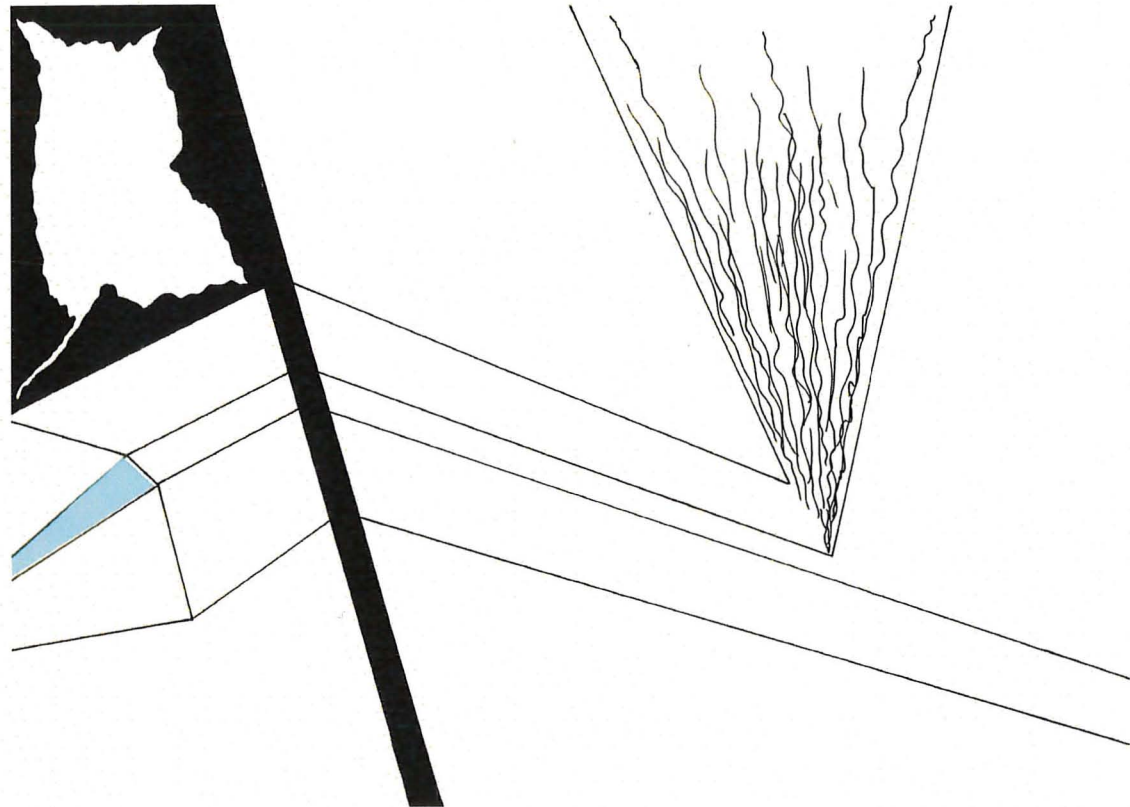
lauren cross

CLUTTERED THOUGHTS

APOPHASIS

david shagena

13



David Shagena's dynamic use of line and accommodating white space that brings attention to craft makes it a successful two-dimensional design. The white space also serves as a resting point for the viewer. This composition pushes fundamental boundaries, including the use of color. Color is often considered as the most intense element of design, and he uses it to create a focal point, rather than saturating the entire composition to add interest.

David's work is composed of a salient rhythm that leads the viewer's eye towards surprising variations in form. If we are to explore the inextricable link between form and content, perhaps his composition leaves us to appreciate the collective tension between the abject and the sterile.

Second Place

Estelle Scheaffer's mixed media illustration explores aesthetics of the everyday through her use of color and application that suggest an unsettled foundation. She presents an ordinary composition that encourages the viewer to unlock the subtle nuance of the artwork's internal logic through her painterly approach. Within our contemporary compulsion to fixate our gaze forward, the content of this work instead, appears to revel in the lack of possibility and celebrates impotence. We see this work as an attempt to uncover the truth through a point of view that is perhaps omnipotent and simultaneously political and distressing.



estelle scheaffer

CITY FALLING

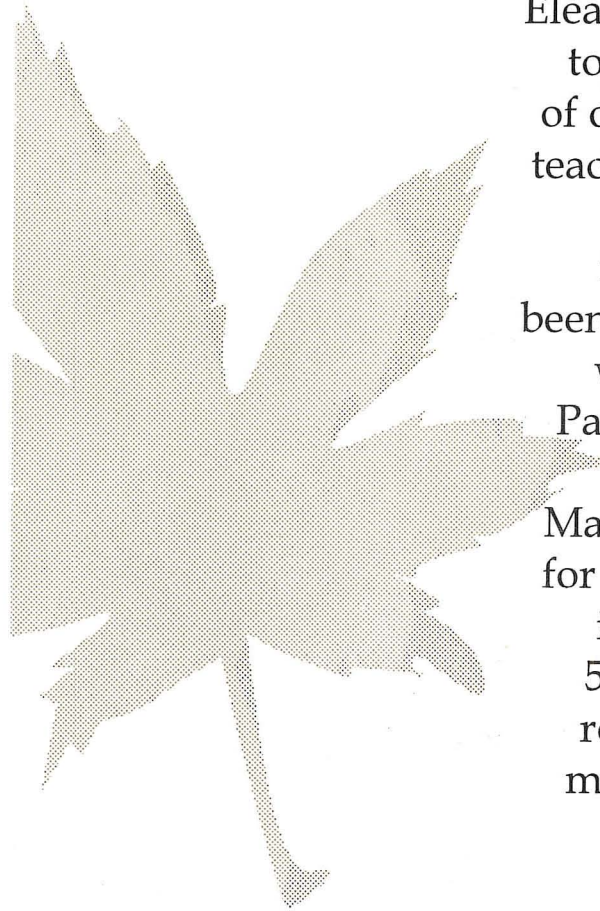
Awarded Writing



ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

17

Beginning with its 25th edition, *Patterns* has annually given the Eleanor Mathews Award to that year's top student creative writer, in honor of one of SC4's most outstanding past teachers. This award for "outstanding creativity, technical skill, and individual style," traditionally has been used to recognize student writers whose work has been published in *Patterns* over multiple editions and/or in multiple genres. This year's Mathews Award goes to Nikki Roulo for her outstanding accomplishments in writing poetry, published in the 52nd and 53rd editions, and also in recognition for her contributions as managing editor of this year's issue.



Personification is tough to pull off convincingly, but by turning the seasons – summer and fall, specifically – into rivaling brothers, this poet has wrought a wonderful extended metaphor. The last line hints at Christmas ornaments, of the winter to come when even Autumn will be defeated.

—Denise Duhamel

We fought, my brother and I.

I adorned exhausted trees,

Weary from summer's dreams:

Fire gold, russet reds,

And pastel brown.

Furious, he brought the rains with him,

But I turned them into the crystal beast

That farmers call frost—

They battled it for their food.

He drew the sun shining warmly down on the wheat

And I, the wind, a cold and brittle tyrant,

Rip away the trees' ornaments.

Blanche Redman Award

nikki roulo
AUTUMN

TO MY TEACHERS, PAST AND PRESENT

19

nikki roulo

First Place

In a charming twist of the "the student becoming the teacher," the speaker of this poem sprinkles her stanzas with French phrases she once learned and is now trying to teach to others. Empathy and humor grace this delightful narrative, n'est pas?

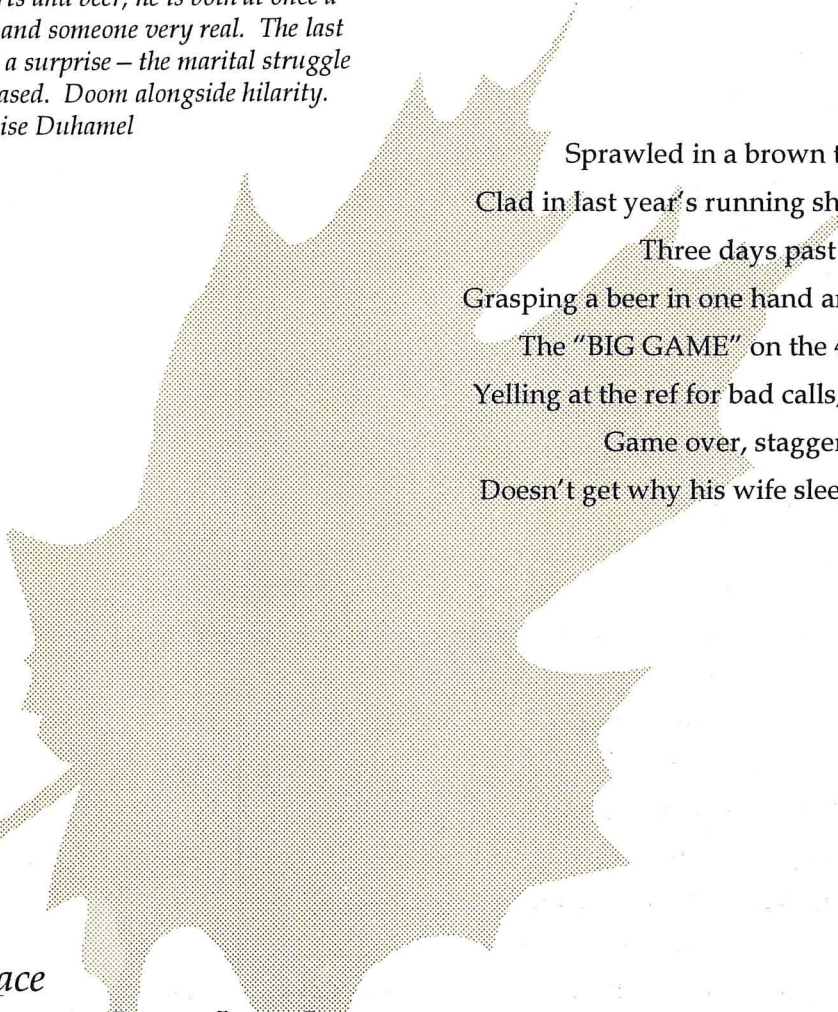
—Denise Duhamel

Once, I admit, when I sat at a faux
Oak desk with graffito charcoaled in,
I thought teaching was easy,
Pas compliqué.
It seemed so simple to select
The right book from millions of titles,
The smooth spines, the primary and subdued colors,
The glossy covers —
Each tempting me.

Sitting at a computer with the waning summer sun
Spilling through the window, I plot
In a chart when my students will hate me and
When they will not —
Il n'est pas difficile.
With a mug of coffee and a mound
Of hastily scribbled answers, I sit by the window, slicing
The numbers of wrong answers in half.
The red ink etching the image
Of my burning paper cuts.
The dark sky is a black television screen,
Showing me the day's events.
The inevitable encounter with a French student,
Who can not answer "Comment ça va?"
The impact of "essay" bruises most students' faces white or red.
I will receive only half of the papers,
But I have learned that teaching is like driving a car.
Since I am learning, am I the student or the teacher?
It is not — I suppose — too simple.



*With each fragmented end-stopped line,
the "he" of the title becomes less and less
appealing. As he escapes into the world
of sports and beer, he is both at once a
cliché and someone very real. The last
line is a surprise – the marital struggle
has ceased. Doom alongside hilarity.*
—Denise Duhamel



Sprawled in a brown tweed recliner.
Clad in last year's running shorts and holey t-shirt,
Three days past a shave.
Grasping a beer in one hand and remote in the other.
The "BIG GAME" on the 42 inch flat screen.
Yelling at the ref for bad calls, belching and farting.
Game over, staggering to bed.
Doesn't get why his wife sleeps in the spare room.

Second Place

joanne vandenabeele

HE DOESN'T GET IT

TOUGH GUYS

deborah robinson

Richard Colwell Award

I appreciate and admire more than anything this author's command of Dean's life, both past and present. Here is one ornery vet fighting cancer, a miserable man who we grow to care for in just six pages. This author is like the cat burglar John Updike asks every short story writer to be: he gets in and he gets out fast. And all the while this author is in full control of the situation and setting, and of this tight structure, all held within a hospital room. Authority and authenticity live in every word of "Tough Guys." And we come to know that Dean has as much heart as this story does. — Margaret McMullan

"WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT THAT shit could kill ya? It's been thirty years and...what the hell?" Dean's face revealed the disgust he felt as the bright orange liquid dripped from the clear bag, snaked down the tube, then squeezed through the wire sticking out of his chest. "It's like a bag full of the flu! God, I hate this! I figured the cigarettes and booze woulda killed me, not some god damned spray Uncle Sam decided wouldn't hurt us. Oh sure, it'll kill trees but not people. Pisses me off!" Dean's voice bellowed down the hospital corridor and then weakened as he began to wretch, holding his fist to his lips. Tears found their way down his wrinkled, pale cheeks.

Dean shook his nearly bald head in disbelief as the whole story seemed like a sick joke. He remembered getting his draft notice and trying not to look scared. "Let's just move to Canada," was the suggestion of his best friend from high school. Some of the guys got so wigged out that they never did act right again. Not him, he sucked it up and got over it. And now, when he should be enjoying retirement, some stinking thing in his blood

screwed it all up! Luck wasn't something he'd had much of.

Dean knew he didn't fit the "favored patient" list in the cancer unit. The nurses tried to avoid his room when they could. He complained about everything! A pain in the ass is what he was; the doctors weren't even too keen on stopping at his room during their rounds. It was no mistake that they did the mandatory visit to Dean's room in the middle of the night. Yeah, Dean could definitely wreck your day! The **Do Not Resuscitate** sign outside his room caught the eye of all that slinked by the dreaded place.

Occasionally the ornery old veteran grabbed his IV pole, unplugged it and headed for the door. Before entering the hallway he looked carefully both ways to avoid meeting anyone on his way out. Exchanging pleasantries wasn't his bag and he didn't want to make small talk. He would stare out the window at the end of the hall until his legs got wobbly; with a cuss under his breath he'd head back to his room.

Dean watched the clock and sighed out loud as the minutes loudly ticked by. He stared at his

bruised arms as if they belonged to someone else. The skin sagged and he tried to remember when they had gotten that way. *When did I turn from a regular guy that did normal stuff to some friggin' invalid? I can't even mow my own lawn. I used to bitch about it. I used to bitch about a lot of things.*

Delores, the staff dietician dutifully walked into Dean's room with a plastered-on smile. He knew she'd lost the bet with the other kitchen staff, and now it was she that had to come down here. A slight smirk spread over Dean's face. "You haven't filled out your meal card, Dean, what would you like for dinner tonight? I'll read the choices to you. Well, let's see here...we have chicken and mashed...Dean, I have to ask you! It's my job!" Dean was staring like a defiant child, his middle finger raised like a weapon in the air. With a crimson face Delores left the room as she muttered under her breath. "Asshole."

Encounters like these seemed to make the days go by a little nicer. Keeping the tough guy front up was so much safer than letting the way he really felt leak out. Dean knew that being pissed was

crimson face Delores left the room as she muttered under her breath. "Asshole."

Encounters like these seemed to make the days go by a little nicer. Keeping the tough guy front up was so much safer than letting the way he really felt leak out. Dean knew that being pissed was a helluva lot better than giving them all what they seemed to want. *I ain't no panty waste!* His jaw tensed with the idea.

Dean sat back in his reclined bed and looked at the wallet-sized picture in the tiny frame. He kept it to himself and turned it down when anyone was in the room. If any of them would see it it'd make him look soft and he didn't want anyone feeling sorry for him. *Sons a bitches! None of their damned business!* The photo was like looking into a mirror except for the nose was Mary's. He stared at the picture hoping it would change; maybe his youngest boy wouldn't really be overseas doing what his old man had done. *Damn, I tried convincing the little shit not to join; the hard headed kid wouldn't listen to a thing I said! Just like dear old Dad.*

It seemed like a lifetime ago that he'd found out why he'd been so damned tired all the time. Nothing looked or felt the

same anymore and the treatments knocked him on his butt. The night that Mary had finally told Brian about the cancer made Dean cringe just remembering her words. "There are so many new treatments for cancer these days. People get better all the time. Don't you worry, Honey. They're taking real good care of your Dad!" Her overly-optimistic voice was high and strained as she talked fast and held her breath.

Leave it up to me to let her do all of the hard stuff. What's new? He'd wanted to get on the phone to reassure Brian but didn't trust himself to keep the emotion out of his voice. *God, I'm a coward!*

The last couple of years had been "less than smooth" when it came to the whole Father and Son thing. Dean and Brian were at each others' throats a lot as the teen had proven to be a bit of a wild child. Secretly, Dean was relieved when the kid finally finished high school and signed up for the Army. Damn kid could use some discipline! Brian had a light-hearted personality like his Mom and it irritated him. Mary and Brian would sit and talk for hours. Dean would hear them laugh as he sat watching T.V. *Wonder what's so damned funny...*

Dean closed his thin, veined eyelids hoping for sleep. He wished for this misery to just be done already. *Well, after I see Brian one more time.* He dozed fitfully, jerking often as the nausea tried to take over. The pills they handed him every few hours made him groggy but comfort wasn't a feeling that he knew anymore. *Can't even have a few beers to take the edge off without puking.*

Dean watched the door and knew Mary would be breezing in any minute now as she got out of work. He grimaced when he thought of how tired she looked lately. Mary tried so hard to hide the fatigue that was clouding her still pretty face. *I could've been a little nicer. She put up with a lot of my shit! When did she start looking so worn out? I wonder if the shoe were on the other foot if I'd take care of her?*

Mary sailed into the dreaded room as if she were happy to be there and kissed Dean carefully on the cheek. The beautiful head of hair she'd always been so proud of was gray at the roots and in desperate need of a trim. "How are you feeling, Honey? I missed you. Did the Doctor tell you when you could come home? How were your blood counts

today?" It seemed like Dean hadn't heard her questions.

Quietly, without looking up, he asked, "Did he call?" The words ended with a choke. He didn't want to worry his obviously frazzled wife with what he'd seen on CNN this afternoon. Chopper down/ Afghanistan/ Six assumed dead/ is all the words said across the bottom of the screen. As much as Dean tried to avoid the news he seemed drawn to it. He didn't think his gut could hurt worse than it already did. He was wrong.

Mary's whisper, "no," came out in a sigh. She busied herself arranging get-well cards and gathering up dirty clothes. It was all closing in on her and she wasn't sure what to do or say next. *Maybe it's time I take a leave from work; I'm so tired....just tired. No one seems to fake happy for me like I do for all of them.* "I need to sit down for a minute." Mary collapsed into the vinyl padded chair next to the bed exhaling the stale air from her lungs. Her heavy head slumped down onto her chest.

They sat in silence; there was nothing to say. It had all been said and it didn't change the facts. Grating hospital sounds echoed through the hallways.

Both faces registered exhaustion and agitation. *Was this it after all of these years of raising kids, working and staying married? Some reward!*

Dean's bruised fist relaxed just a little as he reached over to touch her hand. He traced the blue veins gently and hooked his index finger around hers. She squeezed lightly with a familiarity only they could possibly know. Mary looked into Dean's eyes and forced a tiny, yet tired, smile. Her eyes told him that it was going to be okay...she'd be here. *She'd always been there. Still pretty too.*

The shrill ringing brought them both back to consciousness as they looked at the phone. Dean's trembling hand lifted the phone from its cradle and raised it to his ear. A gravelly "hello" came out. His eyes widened as the rigid face relaxed just a little. "Hey son, I'm doin' okay; how 'bout you? Here, I'll get your Mother. Oh, okay, you wanted to ask me something?" Even though the light-hearted yakking his son was so good at seemed foreign, he actually chuckled in his hoarse deep voice. "Yeah, we did that too! Damn, I guess some things never do change, huh? Okay, I'll tell Mom you said hi...yeah, me too, Buddy. Be careful."

Dean hung up the phone and

took a sip of water. He cleared his throat as he avoided Mary's gaze. Finally, he gave up and let her see the tears pooled in his eyes. Swiping at the moisture gathering on his cheeks, Dean looked directly at his wife.

"What? Quit staring at me."

"What'd he say? Does he seem alright? Come on Dean, tell me! Did he get my package in the mail?" Mary's voice rose louder as she waited for an answer. God, he could be irritating!

"Dean!"

"He's okay... just wanted to talk. What a kid." Dean set the tiny picture upright.



CHRISSEY WAS NINE YEARS OLD. She had shiny amber-colored hair that was usually worn back in a ponytail or two braids to keep her long tresses from becoming tearfully tangled. She had bright green, inquiring eyes, and a smidgen of freckles on her nose running across her cheeks. Her pouty lips were forever engaged: conversing, questioning, demanding, or shouting. She was an easily excited child, possessing an overactive imagination.

Her imagination worked to her advantage when she was praised for the creative art work and the inventive stories she wrote for English class, but it worked to her disadvantage also. The many horror films she had watched didn't help either. When she went to the beach, she could only swim so far out before the panic set in. She would envision the needle sharp teeth of Jaws coming toward her ready to chew her limbs off. She would turn around frantically, her heart racing, and quickly splash back to shore as fast as she could. She knew she was being silly. Her mother had shown her in an encyclopedia that sharks can't survive without

being in salt water. "But you never know!" her mind would rationalize as she frantically raced back to shore. Also, showers bothered her. She wasn't worried about Norman Bates coming to slash her to pieces. She knew her mom wouldn't let him get into the house. What she was worried about was the slimy red goo, of the blob, oozing out of the showerhead and smothering her to nothingness.

For Halloween she never dressed as the beautiful enchanted princess, the silly clown, or even Minnie Mouse. She always had to be something scary—a wicked witch, grotesque goblin, or dreadful Dracula—to scare away the other monsters that may be lurking about. The closest her mom ever got to having her dress up in something that wasn't so hideous, was the year she relented to be a kitty cat... but she had to be a BLACK cat. Her mom had gone to great pains to carefully draw on her face a tiny pink nose and long frisky whiskers. A cute little pink bow was placed between her feline ears. Her mom was ecstatic and oohed and ahed, remarking

how cute she looked. However, when Chrissy went out trick or treating with her friends, Erin and Tommy, she took a moment to draw large pointed triangles above her eyes with her mom's eyebrow pencil she had snuck out of the house, and tore off the pink ribbon. Next, she put in the Dracula teeth she had worn the year before and growled at herself in the mirror. Now she was comfortable. If her "bad luck" didn't scare the other monsters away, her scary face and large fangs would.

Sometimes, Chrissy stayed up half the night in terror, afraid a monster in her closet or a creature under her bed was going to grab her. She would clench her blanket around her body, afraid to move, to breathe, to even blink, because in only an instant she could be eaten up. She couldn't talk to her mother because she would just say, "I told you watching all those horror movies were going to warp your mind." So night after night, she lay tense and unmoving, until she finally fell asleep, due to the exertion it took to hold her body so still.

Chrissy's two best and only

The town of Winston and its crumbling old, one-room schoolhouse become characters themselves in this inventive and imaginative story about nine year-old Chrissy, who fears horror movies, but then goes on and lives one of her own. This author manages to cross genres and mix horror with literary fiction in a short piece, which is a real triumph. The author's patient attention to details, timing, and sense of humor all have big pay-offs in the end. There is even a terrifying and surprising giggle in one crucial scene. — Margaret McMullan

First Place
kristie lynch

IT'S NOT ALWAYS IN YOUR IMAGINATION

friends were Tommy Reynolds and Erin Hanlin. Tommy had straight blonde hair that had an annoying cowlick that stuck up in the back of his head. This led him to argue with his teacher daily, because he insisted on wearing his baseball cap in class to hide his unruly hair. He had big brown eyes with lashes so thick and long they should have belonged to a girl. He had an aquiline nose that was a source of constant teasing by the other children. Due to the teasing he had endured for almost nine years of his life, he was outspoken and cocky, forever on the defensive. Erin was a short, rounded little girl who wore glasses atop her pug nose. She had short, black hair that accented her round face instead of creating the illusion of slimness, Erin's mother had insisted it would. She was an intelligent girl that should have been in a higher grade or even accelerated classes if they would have existed in the small town of Winston, Massachusetts. Her intellect combined with her portly appearance made her a constant source of teasing also.

Chrissy, Tommy, and Erin were drawn together as friends due to the one thing they had in

common... their status as misfits. Chrissy was constantly teased at school due to her fearful nature. Bobby Balwin was continuously inventing new ways in which to get a frightened shriek out of Chrissy. Either it was a spider in her desk or a blood-dripping green claw grabbing her from behind. His latest endeavor was ectoplasm slime from his Ghost Buster kit his grandma sent him for his birthday. He had put the green slime in Chrissy's lunch sack that sat on a shelf above her jacket in the coat room that was adjoined to their classroom.

Bobby couldn't wait until lunchtime. All during morning class he giggled to himself and was reprimanded by his teacher for his disruptions. When lunchtime finally came he made sure he had a chair near Chrissy so he could have a front row seat for the show. Chrissy was seated between Erin and Tommy, as usual, chattering away about the English lesson that had just occurred.

"I can't wait to get home," she said. "I have the neatest idea for a story. It's going to be about my dog, Max. Mrs. Robinson said to write a story from someone else's viewpoint and I thought it would be neat to write a story about a

day in a dog's life. What do you think, Erin?" Chrissy questioned.

Erin didn't have a chance to answer because at that instant Chrissy reached into her sack to pull out her sandwich. As she did, her face turned white and she started to scream. "Oh, my God!" She pulled out her hand with the slimy green goo dripping off her hand. "The blobs got me! Help me!" She shrieked, picturing the old man's hand and arm, then his whole body being dissolved slowly by the goo of the blob. She could see the green slime creeping up her arm, getting bigger as it started to consume her. She jumped up from the table and ran out of the lunchroom screaming, terrified.

"Cut it off," she was mumbling, when she was found sitting on the lavatory floor. "If you don't cut it off it's going to dissolve me."

The slim, petite lunchroom aide just stood in the doorway, shaking her head, not knowing how to handle such a strange girl. Erin went and knelt down next to Chrissy.

"Chrissy, you don't have to have your arm cut off. You're not going to dissolve away. If you come to the sink with me your going to find it will wash



your going to find it will wash off," Erin replied as she leaned towards Chrissy.

"No!" Chrissy shrieked. "If you touch it, you'll be dissolved. There's no way to get it off once it gets on you!" Chrissy yelled hysterically.

Erin reached toward Chrissy again and touched the green goo.

"Oh my God," Chrissy shrieked, her face ashen and near a faint.

Erin calmly said, "Look, see it's not dissolving me. It was just Bobby again, and he had a good laugh this time. Now wash off your hand and let's go finish lunch."

Chrissy felt like a total idiot—again. She couldn't face the other kids. How could she face the humiliation this time? She felt sick... and that gave her an idea.

"Go back to the lunchroom. I'm going home. I don't feel good," Chrissy told Erin as she headed toward the principal's office.

"I don't feel so good," Chrissy announced to Mrs. Steinhouse, the principal, "I want to go home."

Mrs. Steinhouse having heard the story of the earlier excitement by the lunchroom aide and seeing Chrissy's pale, disheveled appearance agreed wholeheart-

edly with the little girl, and didn't question her ailment.

"I'll call your mother to let her know you're coming home, but make sure you go straight home," Mrs. Steinhouse told her.

Chrissy, relieved to not have to go into any explanations, because she hadn't yet decided what her ailment was, left the office and went out the door of the school.

As Chrissy walked past the schoolyard, she could hear the kids taunting, "Chrissy's a sissy! Chrissy's a sissy! Her face felt hot with humiliation.

"I have to find a way for the kids to forget this one," she thought. "I'll have to do something really exciting. Maybe save a baby from a burning building... stop a bank robber.... It had to be something big, something that would make people forget today's incident.... Something gigantic... Maybe I could... I have it!" she thought to herself, as she was nearing an old abandoned structure. "I'll go into the Meyer school building."

The Meyer building was an old one-room school house that had been boarded up when Winston's growing population became too much for the time-worn structure to handle. The old schoolhouse still stood amongst the

progressive housing and stores, because Winston's historical society had fought for, and won, its preservation. The crumbling brick building, pathetic, but historical, stood in wait for the funds to begin its renovation. None of the children Chrissy's age had had the courage to enter the schoolhouse because of the eerie tales that were spun by the older kids.

"If I went inside," Chrissy contemplated, "the kids wouldn't be able to call me a sissy anymore."

But when Chrissy stopped in front of the Meyer schoolhouse to think over her idea, her heart leaped up into her throat and stayed there. With the sun looming behind the grey autumn clouds, the schoolhouse looked scary. Shadows were dancing eerily along the front of the building, seemingly to be spirits warning of danger inside. The boarded up windows placed to keep curious persons out, had Chrissy wondering if the boards were really there to keep something inside, from escaping. The torn, battered sign baring the word "Condemned" was another indication of the eminent doom she would face if she entered. She didn't think she would be

able to muster up the courage she would need to enter.

But... she was tired of being called a sissy. Her mother kept insisting monsters weren't real. Her mom even had her watch, 'The making of Nightmare on Elm Street' to show her that Freddy Kruegar was just a man with makeup on. She had to prove to herself, and to the other kids, that she wasn't a sissy anymore, if she was going to be able to endure going back to school the next day. So, she forced the lump back down into her chest and with determination mixed with fear, she decided she was going to enter the decaying old building and bring something out to prove she had went inside. She would call Erin and Tommy up when she got home and tell them about her adventure. She could envision Tommy and Erin proudly boasting the next day at school....

"You're not going to believe it," Erin would say.

"Yeah, you really won't," Tommy would boast. "Chrissy isn't a sissy anymore."

"You won't believe what she did."

Her classmates would all gather around, curious to find out what Chrissy had done that was so

special.

"Chrissy went into the old Meyer schoolhouse yesterday."

"No way! That sissy wouldn't have the nerve. That's a bunch of baloney!" Bobby would say. "She's such a priss there's nothing you could say that would make me believe any different unless I saw it with my own eyes."

"I did too!" Chrissy would announce, pushing her chest out, her fingers encircled around her belt loops. "I really did. See this," and she would show him an old textbook or something else to prove she went in. Everyone would be so intrigued by her adventure, the incident with the slime from the day before would be forgotten. Yep, this was it, if she was going to be able to continue her education and not be teased the rest of her life, she had to do this.

"I can do this, I really can," she thought to herself.

All she needed was to find a way into the building. She had heard from the stories from some other kids that had older brothers and sisters, that there was a loose board on one of the back windows. This thought sent a shiver through her because it also reminded her of the stories that the older kids told about

the inhabitant of the building. Rumor had it that a hideous dog-like creature stalked inside the building to protect it from intruders.

"To intrude... meant one's death," she had been told.

But at this point she rather take the risk of being eaten alive than have to go back to school tomorrow to face the ridicule. Being afraid of nonexistent monsters and creatures had gotten her into this mess in the first place. Her mom kept insisting that monsters weren't real. Her classmates were kept amused by scaring her when in actuality nothing had ever harmed her. Her night fears had never occurred. She felt if she found the courage to do this nothing would ever scare her again.

Chrissy went around to the back of the building and sure enough she found the loose board.

"Don't go in there," a part of her warned. "You can always run away from home. Far away so you can't be teased. Don't you want to live?"

"Oh, shut up," she said aloud to herself. "There's nothing to be afraid of. It's all in your imagination, as usual. It's just



imagination, as usual. It's just a one-room building. There isn't any place a monster can hide. You see a monster, just get out real quick." And with that thought she squeezed through the opening of the board.

She looked up, and didn't see anything frightening. At the front of the room there was a chalkboard easel. There were pew-like seats with long narrow shelving that the kids had used for tables. A torn, moth-eaten American flag stood in one corner and a little stool sat in another. The cloak room's shelves and hooks were devoid of everything, except for one hand knitted mitten resting on one of the shelves. She looked around the room cautiously, never taking her eye off her escape route.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," she thought.

After she made sure no monster or creature was hiding any place she looked more intently around the dimly sun-lit room. She noticed a pointer sitting on the teacher's desk and picked it up.

"Bobby, recite yesterday's homework," she said in a stern schoolmaster's voice. "You don't know it—then go sit in the corner," she demanded and whacked the pointer on "Bobby's" desk. She laughed and

set the stick down.

Being Bobby, she dragged her feet over to the tiny stool and sat down facing the wall. "Serves you right Bobby, you should pay more attention to your schoolwork than tormenting me." She thought this was neat. "I'll take the pointer to school tomorrow to show the kids." "Tommy, Erin, and I can play here. This can be our clubhouse," she was thinking.

She noticed it was suddenly getting dark and started to panic. "Come on Chrissy, don't let your imagination get you again. It's just getting dark because the sun's setting. You'd better get home anyway, it's getting late."

She turned around on the stool and got up to leave. It really was getting dark.

She could only see faint shadows of the objects in the room. She went and picked up the pointer and decided it was time to hurry home. Her mom was going to have a fit as it was for being so late. Tomorrow she would bring Tommy and Erin and they would have lots of fun. The dimness was getting to her, and she didn't want to spoil the bravery she had exhibited by panicking and running out.

Suddenly she heard a scraping noise coming from the back of

the building, and dropped the pointer, startled. It rolled under the pews.

"Come on don't start losing it," she said aloud to herself. She got down on her knees, reaching under the pew for the dropped pointer. "It was only a mouse!?" When her fingers immediately wrapped around the stick, she was relieved, and she was leaving. She started heading toward her exit...when she saw it.

Her heart quickened, her eyes widened, and her mouth opened to release the pent up energy her adrenaline-ridden body produced, but nothing but a hideous gurgling emerged. She had watched horror movies where the quivering victim—mouth, throat, and lungs working together to produce an ear-shattering scream—would stand still, not moving, not running away. She remembered jumping up and down, her own body tense, screaming quietly, "You stupid person. Move your butt! Run! If I had some slimy, runny, man-eating monster slinking toward me, I'd be gone in an instant. I wouldn't stand there like an idiot," she had thought at the time. However, as the creature kept moving toward her, she couldn't move. She wanted to run away—from the hideous

monster approaching her, but her feet and legs wouldn't move. Her brain had short-circuited, trying to register the unreal to reality.

It was real. She could hear the scratching of the claws on the wooden floor. She could smell the hot putrid breath as it approached. She could see the decaying fur-tufted arm reaching toward her. Her brain finally clicked into action, giving the urgent demand to her feet and legs to run—to get the heck out of there. Her body went into action then. She sprinted for the opening in the window. She could see her escape for dim light was still trying to force its way in, to show her the way out. She ran down the aisle opposite the creature and plunged her body toward the opening in the boarded up window, but she fell short as her foot was grabbed and she fell to the floor. It was pulling her toward it, seemingly in slow motion.

She saw the creature as she was dragged forward kicking and screaming. Standing on its hind legs, it stood about six feet tall. It was wide and muscular with tufts of fur scattered about on the shiny pig-like skin. Its face was a hideous mutation of human and canine features. Its glowing red eyes held the intelligence of

man, but the nose and mouth split off into the snout and jaws of the dog. Its teeth were gnashing together ready to chew her to bits.

"I should have brought a dog biscuit," she thought and giggled hysterically, as the creature's fangs drew closer to her neck.... And she screamed.

"Where the hell were you?" her mother yelled, her anxious anger apparent, as Chrissy entered the house. Chrissy wasn't given a chance to reply, as her mother prattled on. "The police are out looking for you... you should have been home hours ago."

From her mother's blue eyes sprang tears as she noticed the disheveled appearance her daughter presented. Chrissy's undone hair was tangled into great masses. Her face was scratched and her shirt and pants were torn and dirty.

"Oh my God! What happened?"

She pulled Chrissy close planting kisses on her cheeks, trying to smooth out the tangles in Chrissy's hair with her fingers.

"I was so worried. You poor thing, you must be tired," Chrissy's mother was rambling, trying to prolong the answers her daughter would have to eventually reveal. She was afraid of what her answers would be.

She cradled Chrissy in her arms as if she were an infant again. She rocked her little girl back and forth. Her little baby... "Rape" was all she could think. "My poor, poor baby," she cooed.

I went into the Meyer schoolhouse," Chrissy finally had a chance to answer. Chrissy's mom stopped her rocking. "It was real neat at first. Then it got scary. There was a monster... there really was," Chrissy fervently stated.

Chrissy's mother assumed her little girl was in shock because of the nonsense she was hearing, but she let her continue uninterrupted. "I've been telling you that monsters are real. I've been saying they weren't just in my 'magination."

"My God, she's lost her mind," Chrissy's mother thought horrified.

"I told you... I was right!" Chrissy announced in such a grating voice that her mother finally noticed the gleaming red eyes and the sharp pointed teeth her daughter now owned. And she screamed.



KIMBERLY STOOD IN DISBELIEF IN the hallway at the courthouse holding her birth certificate in her hand. Shaking her head from side to side, she kept blinking to focus on what her eyes kept telling her brain she was reading. She refused to believe and kept blinking to re-boot the information path. She walked over to a nearby bench and sat down and began to take some cleansing breaths. Her heart rate was that of an Olympic sprinter in the last meters of the gold medal race. She slowly inhaled through her nose and exhaled through her mouth. Once calmed, she looked again at the simple white piece of paper. This paper told 18 years worth of her life story that she didn't know about. The woman Kimberly had thought was her mother was not on her birth certificate. The name of the woman she thought was her favorite aunt appeared in the section marked "mother." And where the name of the father that raised her should be, read *Unknown*. Kimberly found the nearest bathroom and emptied the contents of her stomach.

When she arrived home, she went to her bedroom and closed the door. She attempted to turn her focus on her suitcases. The brand new matching Travelpro bags with matching carry-on sat on her bed. They were gray with a pink interior. Her aunt, Mary, had bought them for her as a bon voyage gift. With tops open, Kimberly decided they looked like hungry hippopotamuses waiting for food. She began feeding them. She picked out coordinating outfits for her seven day trip to Mexico. Spring Break came at just the right time for Kimberly. She began working faster and not paying attention to what she was putting into the suitcases. Her increased pace was in hope of tomorrow morning getting here sooner. When the hippos were full, she zipped them up, put her birth certificate in her carry-on and wheeled her luggage into the living room and readied it for departure.

The only woman she had known to be her mother was sitting in the living room reading.

"All set for tomorrow morning?" said Emma, her

mother, still half paying attention to her book.

"Yup," said Kimberly. "Funny, when I walked into my bedroom and saw the suit cases on my bed, they looked like two hungry hippos."

"Mmmm hmmm," said Emma not looking up from her book.

"Two *giant* hippopotamuses in the middle of the room. Do you see them, Mom?"

"Mmmm hmmm. Are those your new ones from Aunt Mary?" said Emma still not looking up from her book.

"Yep. Did you go shopping with her to pick out these two giant hippopotamuses?" asked Kimberly.

"Hmmm mmm, er no, what? What was the question?" Emma asked finally tearing herself away from the book.

"Never mind. Did you hear anything I said?"

"Yes!" said Emma. "I was listening. Giant hippos, middle of the room, Aunt Mary, leaving tomorrow...I heard it all."

"Did you, Mom? Did you really?"

"I did! I heard it. Do you have

There are so many unexpected revelations in "A Break For The Generations," which make Kimberly someone we care for and worry about long after we finish reading that last sentence. Kimberly travels to Mexico with her friend for spring break, only to find herself traveling inward to figure out who she is and who her real parents are. The author offers all kinds of surprising twists and observations – golden nuggets such as the unpacked and open luggage Kimberly sees as hungry hippos waiting for food – are gifts from a gifted writer. – Margaret McMullan

Second Place
colleen ryan

A BREAK FOR THE GENERATIONS

your passport?" asked Emma.

Kimberly did not answer her mother truthfully. "Yes."

"Well now we just wait for tomorrow morning to come," said Emma.

The day before, Kimberly was rummaging through her important papers to look for her passport. She pulled out her Sterelite file folder container and checked in each Pendeflex hanging folder; no passport. Frustrated, she rubbed her temples, *think, think, think*, she said to herself. It was only two more days until she left for Mexico and she needed that passport. Pressing harder and squeezing the bridge of her nose, she finally squeezed out the solution.

She got in her car and drove to the courthouse where they kept the public records. She filled out the paperwork, paid the \$10 fee and presto! The clerk handed her her birth certificate. Problem solved. She could leave and re-enter the country. She did not anticipate leaving everything she had known to be true about her identity at that musty smelling courthouse and did not anticipate entering the fecal smelling zoo that would become her reality.

The next morning, Kimberly

was rustling in her room. She did not sleep. When she closed her eyes, she could only see the image:

"Mother: Mary Cane
Father: Unknown"

She had not decided what she was going to do with this information. She settled on not saying anything to her parents until she came back from vacation. She began organizing a few things on her dresser. In one pile, she had offers from three different colleges for an academic scholarship to med school. In another pile, she had her high school graduation invitations still in the cardboard box ready to be stuffed. And in the last pile, the results of her SAT, ACT and MCAT scores. Very soon she would need to decide her path for the future.

"Kimberly..." called Emma from the living room. "Jessica's here!"

Kimberly stuffed all her papers into her Sterelite with the intention of sorting it out when she got home from vacation.

She climbed into Jessica's car and they headed for the airport. Kimberly decided not to tell Jess of her discovery. At the airport, Kimberly noticed all the gray suitcases. She wondered what

their interior color was. Was it pink like her hippopotamuses? Does everyone carry around a hippopotamus with them?

Kimberly and Jessica boarded the plane and settled in their seats. When the plane took off, the smooth motion of the plane and the white noise of the humming engines proved to be too much for Kimberly to resist. She could no longer focus; exhaustion took over. She laid her head back and fell asleep until she got to Mexico.

The girls deplaned and set foot into Puerto Vallarta airport to the sounds of Mariachi bands playing in their high pitched celebratory music. The band members wore long sleeved polyester disco suits with those ridiculous sequined hats. The only good thing Kimberly saw in her immediate range was a senorita selling ice cold beer next to the Mariachis.

"Jess," she said poking her friend. "Over there...it's time."

There was no drinking age in Mexico and Kimberly was looking forward to taking advantage of every minute of it. The girls walked over to the young woman selling beer and bought two Cervezas. Kimberly took the first sip of her legally bought beer ready to start her



bought beer ready to start her vacation in full swing.

"Plehhhhh," Kimberly spit out her beer. "It's flat!"

She began trying to talk to the young woman selling the beer. The woman did not speak English and did not understand Kimberly. She began yelling at the woman and noticed armed security guards looking her way. She decided to drop the matter. She was on their territory, not hers.

By the time she turned to Jessica to ask for a sip of her beer, Jessica had just swallowed the last gulp.

"Ahhhhhhhhh" she said. "Don't worry Kimberly, soon as we get through customs and get our luggage, we'll find someone else selling beer."

The girls went through customs and presented their birth certificates. The official looked at Kimberly. Did he know what it meant that it read "Unknown" where a father's name should be? He stamped her passport and said, "*Gracias*."

Kimberly and Jessica headed for the luggage carousel. Jessica's bags were the first ones off. Kimberly helped her pull them off the turn-style and began watching for her gray hippos. Twenty minutes had passed and

no sign of her luggage. After forty-five minutes, Kimberly set out to try and find someone who spoke English to help her find her bags. It took Kimberly two hours to fill out the paperwork and file a claim. She had no luggage in a foreign country. Good thing she kept all her valuables in her carry-on.

The girls got into a taxi cab and headed for their hotel. Jessica wanted to go to the beach right away. Kimberly wanted to lay down and sulk. Kimberly told Jessica to go check everything out and she was going to try and catch a half hour nap.

Once Kimberly laid her exhausted body down on the bed, her mind began to wonder and she allowed herself to start asking questions. *Why*, was the first one. Why would Aunt Mary give me to her sister to raise? Why would my mom agree to it? Why is my father unknown? Why did they have to make it like Emma was my mother? Why not have Mary still be the mother, but "Aunt" Emma would raise me. Why? Why? Why?

ENOUGH! She told herself.

The only thing she could do at this time was to party away her reality. Because when she got home, the tangled web would be

dismantled, string by string.

On the second day of their trip there was a knock on the door. Kimberly answered the door and looking down saw her two hippos in the hall. Her luggage had finally arrived. She signed the clip board and dragged them into the room and began unloading them. She was starting to feel better.

The next five days were a haze. Jessica and Kimberly hit every discotheque on the strip. In every bar they walked into, they were greeted with a tequila popper. On the last night they met two American boys on vacation and partied until they passed out.

The next day, Kimberly and Jessica vied for the bathroom as they both had terrible hangovers.

NEVER AGAIN WILL I DRINK TEQUILA she thought.

They boarded the plane for home and slept the whole way home. When Kimberly got home, her mother and Aunt Mary were there to greet her. She still felt like she was suffering from alcohol poisoning and did not feel this would be a good time to discuss anything. She exchanged niceties and retired to her room.

Over the next few weeks, Kimberly was busy with final exams and filling out paperwork

to attend University of Michigan Med School. She still had not found the right moment to confront her two mothers and was frankly getting sick of the topic occupying her mind every moment of the day.

On graduation day, she posed for a picture with Emma and Mary. She felt like a liberal at a conservative convention.

"Smile!" said her known father.

"Mom, I need to stop in the bathroom before we leave for dinner."

Kimberly went into the bathroom and ran into Shelby, a classmate.

"Kim, do you have a Tampon? I just started! On graduation day!! Ugh!"

It suddenly occurred to Kimberly, *when did I last have my period?*

"Kim...." said Shelby

"Oh! Yeah sure...here you go," said Kimberly handing over the goods.

Kimberly realized it had been over two months since she had a period. She instantly knew... the two Americans they met on the last night...drunken haze... hotel room....She didn't even know their names!*know their names...unknown...* She finally understood who "Unknown"

was. She began to do the math. Calculating her age, subtracting it from Mary's, counting back nine months... It was right around the time of Spring Break that she would have been conceived.

With med school in her cross hairs, she finally figured out the answers to her own questions. Mary had a bright future ahead and Emma was already married. It made sense now why they chose to have Emma raise her.

A week after graduation, Kimberly sat down with Emma to have a talk. She decided she was never going to reveal to Emma and Mary what she knew. There was no point now that she understood it all. These women made the best choice they thought at the time and Kimberly had a good life.

"Mom, I have something to tell you that will change the course of our futures. I'm pregnant and I still want to go to med school and become a doctor. I don't know who he father is...and I cannot raise this baby and go to med school at the same time. Can you help me?"

"Yes, I believe I can," said Emma.



THERE HAS BEEN MUCH WRITTEN about the 22nd of November, 1963. That date is well set in the psyche of three generations, and pounded into the heads of their offspring. My recall of that day is based upon my elder siblings and parental accounts of what I was doing. Though a precocious child, my memories of what I was up to at eleven and one half months old are hazy at best. I do recall getting into a discussion later about the social differences before and after that date. The theory that God blinked, and the world went crazy had been put forth as an explanation of the 1960s. I didn't buy it. The day was not influenced by any greater power. The rest of the decade was not any stranger than those that followed. The date then had only two significant facts to it: the Kennedy assassination, and my paternal grandmother's birthday. To me, the second fact was the greater of the two.

November 22nd came into play in my life yet again. This time it affected me in a more significant, more intimate way. The years passed quickly, seventeen of them to be precise. By October of 1980, my life was rushing along full steam ahead. I had graduated high school and

enlisted. I had my life plotted, and had completed boot camp, on my way to becoming a lifer in the Navy. My fiancée, Lori, was finishing her last semester in college, on her way to being an elementary school teacher. Life was good.

On the eleventh of October, news came that would forever change the plan. A couple of friends of ours had picked me up at the base. After we turned right on to Colonial Ave., Katie informed me that Lori had a surprise for me. "She said it was huge. There is just one catch: we got to meet her at Disney World, near that new section they're building."

"Jerry, you can drop me at the mall!" I stated emphatically.

"Calm down now, man, it won't be that bad..." Jerry told me, as he turned south to head to the theme parks. "Lori said that we were to get you there. She said we won't be long, and then we can go off to do whatever it is you want."

"You all know how I feel about paying homage to the 'Rodent!' Why is she torturing me like this? Katie, do you have any idea what her secret is? You two talk about everything..." I said trying to figure what the hell was going on. Katie shook her head and said nothing as we pulled into

the park. After we entered, they told me where I was to go meet Lori, and then they went to get some food.

I wondered what was up, as I wandered toward the new section that was under construction. I wound up standing by a bench, next to the sign that proclaimed '*Come Visit the Future! Come Visit Epcot Center! Opening in the summer of 1981!*' I lit a Marlboro, and felt a little conspicuous. I was wearing my dress blues, and had the feeling I looked like a Cracker Jack ad. I turned back to look for the others, when I saw her. Lori was wearing a red and white gondolier's blouse, white shorts, and sandals. Her long raven black tresses were flowing down her back. Mirth twinkled in her ice blue eyes. My eyes traced her lean frame from painted toes to curly locks, and fully appreciated that growth spurt that put her over six feet tall. That last thought was quickly driven from my head by her choice of head gear. There was the class valedictorian, basketball and track star, stunning beauty, and love of my life walking toward me with a personalized set of *mouse ears* on her head! I shook my head. Laughing, I stubbed out my smoke, and waited for the hug. She damned near knocked me over with

"November 22nd 1980: The Day God Abdicated" is a sucker punch to the heart. This essay will stay with you. Our funny, tough-guy Navy narrator (he's just out of boot camp) takes us through the dramatic events that lead up to marrying, Katie, the love of his life and an accident that changes everything. This essay is an example of creative non-fiction at its best, taking us through the scenes, showing us, with a smart, pensive narrator telling us even more. I especially admire the humor and grace this author allows in his scenes. We feel what he feels. He lets us think and question what he thinks and questions, only to discover that there are no clear, comforting conclusions of real heartbreak. —Margaret McMullan

Kathleen Nickerson Award
mick goode

NOVEMBER 22ND 1980: THE DAY GOD ABDICATED

it.

"You might want to sit, Michael..." she said, her sweet alto voice carrying in the still muggy air. She stood there with her arms around me. Looking down into my eyes, she nervously bit her lower lip, and waited on my response.

"Your mode of dress leads me to think you don't have sit-down news, Lorelei..." I countered.

She shook her head in disbelief. I stretched and kissed her lips. Peering into my eyes, she chuckled, removed my cover and ruffled my short hair. "Are you sure?"

"Should I be?" I replied, as I grabbed my Dixie cup and placed it back on my head. Being not that long out of basic training, the last thing I wanted was to get caught out in uniform, uncovered.

"We got to get married!"

"We are getting married. June 21st ..." came my stunned response. "Why, do you doubt that?"

"No, my love... you didn't hear me. WE'VE GOT TO GET married..." she slowly repeated. My jaw hit the ground, as the implication of the news sunk in. My eyes lit up, as I swept her off her feet and swung her around. Jerry and Katie found us on the bench, plotting. After joyous congratulations were shared, we left 'Rodentville' for a more comfortably adult setting.

In the ensuing bedlam that arose, the earliest date for a church

wedding turned out to be November 22nd. I figured that I couldn't forget the date, so with the wedding and the baby, I was triply ecstatic. Though hectic, life was still good. A blizzard of paperwork, a flurry of activity by friends and relatives later, all the T's were dotted and I's were crossed, and vice versa. All was finally calm, 48 hours before the date. Shaking our heads, we both swore to the other that the pleasure would be worth all the pain. Life was good and getting better by the minute. Exhaling for the first time in six weeks, we went to sleep, both assured that it would work out according to plans.

The dawn broke on a beautiful crisp fall morn. I was awakened by the trill of a bird in the willow tree outside our window. I stretched, yawned and got vertical. The aroma of a rich, dark roast coffee compelled me to head toward the kitchen. Just as I was entering the dining room, I heard "FREEZE." I froze. Lori came in, wearing only an apron and a smile. Her long raven hair was pulled back into a ponytail. Her ice blue eyes were twinkling, as she pushed me down onto a stool at the counter.

"Morning, lover. I guess it won't be too much bad luck, all things considered" she purred, as she leaned in and kissed me. She leaned past me to grab some coffee, when I patted her lightly on her shapely rump. "Okay laddie, after breakfast, you're history until 1:30. The wedding is

at 2. If you bail, your funeral will be at 2:10. It's a damned shame too, because I was going to keep an eye on you until then. Maybe even a hand or two, but..." she giggled.

"Sorry, darlin'. I just couldn't resist" I apologized, as I accepted the mug.

"I forgive you, as long as it's only me you can't resist," she said magnanimously. Smiling, she went to the kitchen and grabbed the plates. Setting them on the table, she turned and asked, "Have you thought about a name yet? Is there one, in particular, you'd like to saddle the kid with? I know it's early, but no sense waiting until the last second. Make you a deal: you get to name any girls, and I'll name the boys. I promise you there won't be a junior. How does Philip Peter sound?"

"Sounds to me like a good name. As far as a daughter goes, I was thinking about Celeste Cecilia, after the great grandmothers. We can worry about twins a little later," I stated, as we sat. I took a bite, stole a kiss and continued. "These eggs are perfect, just like the cook!" She slapped my hand playfully, and then kissed me. We ate breakfast, continuing in the same vein: threatening each other with what we would do to them, once we were legal. Life was outstanding.

We finished breakfast. I cleared the table, she disappeared for a minute. I turned from the sink; she was leaning



in the doorway with her hand behind her back. "See ya later, lover," she told me, as she tossed me some jeans and a t-shirt, and then pushed me out the back door. "You go take care of the mutiny you have with the groomsmen. They best show up dressed, or else...."

"Maybe you can have the girls point out that it is in their best interest to get with the program? I don't know how much they'll listen to me. I'm not important; I'm just the groom. With the beer off limit until the reception, they won't be convinced by my telling them that misery loves company. I guarantee that. I'll pay you back tonight..." I pleaded.

"We're going to need a vacation, to recover from the honeymoon" she laughed, and then said that she'd talk to the gals. Pulling my shirt over my head, I laughed. I was marrying the right girl. It was fate. There were only two people in the entire state of Florida that had the gall to wear a shirt that proudly proclaimed *I skied Mount St. Helen's, 5-18-80'*, complete with burn holes on the back. I was marrying the other one. Life was perfect!

The morning was everything anyone could have wanted, yet by mid afternoon the slight haze that precedes a cold front had engulfed central Florida. The temperatures had settled in the low 50's, with a steady 15 MPH breeze. That fact

didn't sit well with the other males in the wedding party. As predicted, none of the groomsmen were happy with the decidedly Scottish motif; to a man, they balked about their wearing kilts. "It isn't the costume, it's the timing. If it were June..." the guys stated. They gave in only when it was explained by their own mates that it was in their best interest to don such. After that hurdle was cleared, the wedding went off without a hitch, like it is supposed to do. The guys were still muttering, but looked striking in the blue-green plaid of the Black Watch tartan. The girls were all wearing plain earth tones gowns, with woven shawls. Lori's gown was a traditional peasant gown, in snowy white. In lieu of a veil, she wore a wreath woven of irises, violets and tea roses. A shawl in the McIntyre tartan was draped on her shoulder. The effect was spectacular.

We walked back down the aisle, and went to the reception and the photo ops. Life was jubilant, taxing, but good. As things got hectic, Lori would kiss me and said it'd be alright. I believed her. Then the bottom started to drop out, without anyone noticing. The speeches, the dances, the customary toasting and rituals of formal weddings began to eat away at the clock. Knowing that the flight was for 5:45, to see the hands slip past 4:30 was beginning to raise a little consternation betwixt my bride, myself, and the rest of the

wedding party. We wanted to be gone; they still wanted to party.

Compromise is the art of doing what you want, while making the other party think they're getting a good deal. We both had slipped outside for a smoke. We were both tired, and things looked like this was would go on all night. As we had other plans, we decided then that at five, we were out of there, to hell with the rest of them. I casually mentioned that my bomb was still armed for the getaway that we had missed the weekend before. She hugged the stuffing out of me.

"Have I told you in the last five minutes how much I love you? We're only twenty minutes from the airport, so that would give us a whole twenty five minutes to get on the plane..." she gushed. Her eyes shone like a lighthouse beacon on a stormy night. "My car got all the 'Just Married' signage, the tin cans, suitcases, etc. Are you parked around the corner? I'd just as soon slip out...."

We had a contingency plan set. Just as we walked in, her dad looked at the clock and decreed that we needed to change into traveling clothes. They led us toward separate rooms to change, to make sure that we wouldn't do what we had planned. They didn't make a thorough check; if they had, they wouldn't have chosen those two rooms. The bridal room had an external exit in it. The room I was



in had a door that opened on to a corridor which led past the kitchen, then out to the street. We made use of the egresses, and made it to my car before they realized their error. As we sped off into traffic, we passed a bank clock that said it now 4:57 PM. Life was great! Lori cuddled up to me and whispered into my ear that she had another secret to tell me. I told her it could wait until we got to the airport. She slid back to her side of the car. The radio played "We've Only Just Begun." She laughed. Then the world went black.

The second time I awoke on that day was quite different than the first. This time, I was greeted by the icy feel of a stethoscope that must have been labeled "Freeze twenty minutes before using." The florescent lighting was brighter than the noon day sun. My head hurt. My vision was blurred, and partially blocked. Just as things began to stop swimming in front of my eyes, some quacklet with a still dripping diploma was asking something that I was trying to comprehend. Still groggy, I mumbled something. Whatever it was, it seemed to satisfy him enough to leave me alone. As I lay there, the smells hit me, making me aware of my surroundings. I was here. Here was an ER, probably UMC. Where was Lori? A nurse came to take my vitals, and I asked her. She put a thermometer in my mouth, saying she would check in a minute.

As the metal tip cleared my lips, I overheard another wet behind the ears doctor ask the nurse at the desk to contact "Miss McIntyre's next of kin." I was trying to get out of the bed, demanding just what the hell he meant by that. They gave me a shot. I was back in the dark.

The next few days were a blur. The Chaplin had my personal leave reclassified to bereavement leave. I found out what the hell happened. A drunk ran a stop light, and broadsided the car. There was nothing that we could have done to avoid the crash, leaving when we did. Lori died on the operating table. In a split second I lost my wife, and unborn child, due to someone climbing behind the wheel impaired. The funeral was the Tuesday following the wedding. I was calm, only due to the medication. Everyone was telling me how sorry they were. They then proceeded to tell me it was "God's Will." Such platitudes were scant comfort to this recently widowed young man. We should have been roasting in St. Thomas; would have been, had not that drunk climbed behind the wheel. I wondered aloud what sort of God would steal a 21 year old angel, my personal angel, from the world. No answer came. No words of solace eased my pain, calmed my tortured soul. The years have passed; with time, the pressure has turned the pain into sorrow, much like coal is

turned into diamonds. It might not hurt the same, but it pains me still, coloring my actions to this day. Good news, bad news, no news... it isn't all the same.

I've seen and heard people pray for whatever. I have become convinced that God finally grew weary of all the begging, so He abdicated. He died, retired, or went on vacation; if He left someone in charge, no one is telling. Some may say that I am bitter. I did give prayer an honest try. I tried religion again. I tried several of them. I found nothing but hypocrisy. More atrocities against one's fellow man have been disguised in God's name than one can shake a stick at. The Crusades, the Inquisition, Jihads, the Salem witch trials, the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland — what have they in common? All are acts of religious persecution. All are done in the name of God. Is He listening? Is He amused? Is He pissed off? I cannot say, and it is not my place to speak for Him. I have seen things in this life that the God I grew up believing in would not have liked, nor would have allowed. The fact that they have happened, leads me to one conclusion. We had best help our fellow men, and help ourselves. The odds of getting help from above are slim to none.



THERE WAS A CEDAR TREE IN OUR FRONT yard, when I was a kid. It was the only one on the entire 140 acres that my family owned. My entire life, it stood like a sentinel against strangers. It didn't just spring up there. The tale was that dad put it there, without regard for his health. He had been helping my grandpa put up a new pasture fence, when they came across two cedars that were little more than seedlings. Most of the property was long needle pine, so the odds of finding two cedars were quite long.

One day in February of 1954, two weeks after my brother Paul was born, almost the entire household was sick. The only two who weren't were Mom and the baby. Grandpa and grandma came over, to drop off some groceries. Grandma helped mom with the other three kids, so mom could tend to Paul. Grandpa, in his Dutch accented English, mentioned to dad that one of the trees had died. My dad drug himself out of his sick bed. Wrapping up, he stepped out into the damp, cold air. Trudging to the back half of the property, armed only with a shovel and a 100 degree fever, he dug up the remaining tree and transplanted it in the front yard. He did everything to make sure it survived through the rest of the winter, and that little tree flourished.

The tree, by the time I was able to truly appreciate it, stood over

twenty-eight feet tall. The lowest branches extended out some eight feet from the trunk, and were a foot off the ground. It had a perfect conical shape. It looked like a giant Christmas tree. It was always the right shade of green. If you ventured under it, you were greeted by the sharp, woody, relaxing cedar scent and fallen needles, which were the color of rust. The bark and branches were the same shade, owing to the fact that not much sunlight could get through the dense foliage. The same could be said for the rain. I could nap under it in a downpour without getting soaked, if I brought a sleeping bag or blanket. If I didn't, the dead needles would dig into my bare back, marking me as surely as a briar patch, only not so deep. Many days I would hide in amongst its branches. Sometimes it was to ignore my sister Dot, who was always trying to get me to do her chores; other times, it was just to clear my head. That tree was also my earliest continued defiance of authority. Mom didn't want the kids to go traipse out in the woods alone, and wanted no one under the tree. Later, I found it was for our safety; she didn't want us breaking our arms, legs or necks. She also was worried about snakes, but never in all the years I would duck under the canopy did I find any sign of one. I came across a discarded skin, or a fresh snake hole in the yard, but never around the tree. The closest

thing to animal life under there was an occasional crayfish mound.

When I was eight, my cousin Michael Wayne was killed in a hunting accident. He was ten months older than I. I didn't cry at the funeral. "Big boys don't cry," I was repeatedly reminded. When I got home, I crawled under that tree and let my tears go. They fell like rain. The relaxing scent of the tree, with the cold, musty dankness of the dirt beneath the needles, the bite of the bark, as my arms brushed against the limbs, the familiar sting of the dead needles under my knees comforted my young soul as nothing else could. It was my sanctuary, my safe haven.

Funny thing about a sanctuary: they're forgotten when the need passes.

Two and a half years after Mike's funeral, I had met an angel named Lori. She was a tall, slender girl with hair so black that in the right light, it took on a bluish tinge. Her eyes were piercing ice-blue lasers that could melt a heart, or shred a soul depending on her mood. Her lips were shaped in a natural cupid's bow. They were soft, wet and almost always tasted of peach lip gloss. Her nose, in profile, formed a perfect right angle; it matched her face — not too big, nor too small. She had skin that was soft as a baby's bottom and a complexion that was clear and perpetually tanned. She had a sharp mind, coupled with a wickedly playful wit. She was the first

First Place
mick goode

The evocative details of the narrator's sanctuary — the woody scent after a rain, the fallen needles the color of rust — lure you into a narrative of a lost time and place, a lost love, a lost home. This is an American story, an immigrant's story, a generational story, all of which climax with the miraculous dignity of a mother's last words and a hurricane that changes everything. I so admired the quiet grace of this essay. — Margaret McMullan

THE CEDAR TREE

girl around my age I could relate to, and with whom I could have a *real* conversation. Due to the fact I was well read, grew up far outside of town and in a household full of females, most of the girls my age didn't know what to make of me. Lori was different. I could talk to her, and be understood. I was the first boy that looked at her as an equal, not as a *girl*, or just as an object of lust.

As we got to know each other, she told me about a willow tree that was in her back yard. The tree was old. The branches sprouted from the straight trunk like a hydra, and fell like a veil all the way to the ground. She'd go and sit under the tree to think, to pray, or to hide when her folks would get into a major argument. I told her about my cedar. We started to talk about what caused us to use them as we did. In doing so, I became her willow; she was my cedar. For several years, I didn't avail myself of the tree. I didn't have the need to.

The best thing about sanctuaries: they're there when the need is greatest.

The Christmas after the wreck that took Lori from my arms, I slipped off from my kin, and went back to the tree's comforting embrace. I was in there, off and on, for the two weeks I was home. It was the only place I felt whole. Seventeen years later, it was where I mourned my dad. My siblings thought I was nuts. I felt it was the best thing my father ever did for me, even though he did it almost nine years

before I was born.

Right before I moved up here in August of 2003, I visited the homestead for the last time. I had a long talk with my bedridden mom. She was two months shy of eighty years old at the time. She had raised nine kids, while my dad spent all his spare time at one of the three bowling alleys in the area. She had survived her first heart attack in 1959, and then went on to have three more babies. She had two more heart attacks over the years, buried her parents, in-laws, and her husband. Her body had begun to wear out. As she lay in the new hospital bed, in that faded floral print house dress, her hair finally all gray, face lined with all the joy and tears of her life, she looked old. Speaking loud enough to be heard over the A/C and the oxygen generator she was hooked to, she told me, "Don't let your brothers and sisters pile guilt on you, if you can't come back for my funeral. Go live your life. I know you love me, and I'd rather you remember me alive, than dead." She also told me to take a bit of the cedar with me, for she knew what it meant to me. I followed her advice. The next week, I moved up here.

Two years later, Hurricane Rita slammed the coast. She washed away Cameron Parish, and left the rest of southwest Louisiana and southeastern Texas strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of all the residents' lives. Of the sixty tornados spawned by the storm in Louisiana, forty touched down

in Calcasieu Parish; of those forty, twenty-five hit the property. One of them vapor locked mom's house, and then topped the cedar tree even with the house. The tree went from thirty three to twelve feet high in the matter of seconds. My little brother told me they never found the top.

In January of 2009, I went home. Mom had died on New Year's Eve. I got there late on Monday the fifth. I went first to the house, and then went to my eldest sister's house to stay for the duration of my stay. I couldn't tell much that night. The darkness conceals a multitude of sins. The next day, I saw it for the first time in six years. The mighty tree that was my comfort, my shield, was now a shrub! It was trying to hold on to life, but the damage was too severe. My little brother had yet to get the rest of it down, for he was too busy rebuilding the house. The tip that once cried out for an angel was long gone. The ring of evergreen boughs that were at the base was still green, but now there was a slight tinge of rust added. My brother Ed told me he'd have to remove it, but he hadn't had the time. I wept.

Eleven months later, I had a message on my answering machine. All Ed said was, "There was a cedar tree in the front yard." I never was more relieved to hear the past tense, as I was then. The tree, once a bastion of comfort, was now finally at peace. I cried again, this time for joy.



DEATH IS A PART OF LIFE THAT NO one enjoys to discuss. It brings upon an emotional pain that finding a relief for is excruciatingly hard to do. But yet even after Death takes people away, our lives must go on. As a small child I knew Death existed, but I believed that it only visited older people in their seventies, eighties, nineties, or for a few in their hundreds, and that people would go peacefully in their sleep and go off to Heaven or Hell depending on the person they were. It was a childish belief looking back on it now as I sit here in this hospital room, but back then I still believed Santa Claus was making a list and checking it twice to figure out if I was naughty or nice. Back then I had an innocence to me; I had not yet seen the real world, I had only seen a happy colorful version of it.

It wasn't until 2001 when I was eight, just a couple weeks shy of being nine years old and in the third grade, that I had my first experience with Death taking a loved one. The person that Death had taken from me was my second grade teacher Ms. Wallace whom I had become very fond of over the past year and a half, which had been a large portion

of my life that I could remember. She was the kind of teacher that kids would go back and visit long after they moved on from her second grade class room. She was an incredible woman with a passion for teaching that made young kids enjoy school and want to learn. I remember in the third grade when I was reading the latest Harry Potter book, I would go to her and discuss the book, or even just discuss life. It was during Spring Break of that year when she was taken from us; the news came to me when there were two days left of vacation. It was about 5:30 in the afternoon, my brothers and I were playing video games on our Nintendo 64 enjoying ourselves; my parents were in the kitchen cooking dinner after a day at work, it was a nice relaxing and pleasant day that would've faded into memory, but the phone rang suddenly to change everything. It was my mother who answered the phone; she said hello as she always did and went off into her regular conversation with whomever and us children paid no attention, but this conversation was different; the sound of her voice changed from a happy one abruptly to sadness, a sound every child

knows of their own parent instinctively, and my brothers and I knew something awful had happened. My mother kept herself together on the phone as she was trying to hide whatever the news was from us children for the time being. She hung up the phone and whispered something to my father, and at this point our videogame had stopped and we just sat listening to pins drop, waiting to get any sliver of information as to what the mysterious phone call was about. About a minute later our mother called me and my twin brother, Jordan, into the kitchen leaving my older brother, Adam, in the living room alone. She sat the two of us down at the kitchen table where so many happy meals took place, took the deep breath of courage and sadness that a mother needs to take to break devastating news to her young children, she looked us both in the eyes at the same time and said, "Jordan, Justin, this is going to be extremely hard to hear, but Ms. Wallace has passed away...."

I'm not quite sure of her words after that, they didn't matter to me, I was still trying to wrap my young mind around the fact that a very good friend and a beloved teacher of mine had just passed.

Second Place

justin huffman

DEATH

In this short essay, the organizing principle, Death, becomes the main character. And though the title and concept of death is huge, the author makes the subject personal, focusing on the deaths that have most moved him, forcing us to encounter what he encounters, which is, of course, life.

—Margaret McMullan

"... Lisa called." Her voice had snuck back into my ears, "She knew you guys were close to her and wanted to let you know before you go back to school Monday. Are you guys okay?"

I can remember asking a few questions in a shaken voice of how it happened and all anyone knew was that she passed in her sleep down in the Caribbean. I held myself together enough to not cry in front of my parents, something that I didn't like to do, and escaped to the comfort of my bedroom so that I would not be seen by anyone and be in solidarity. Alone I stood, in my room, in silence, looking deep into my mirror for answers, believing that it would tell me what to do. It was as I stood when the sadness wrapped around me like a blanket and I began to weep. A feeling of numbness swept over me. I didn't understand how any of this could happen; how could Death just come for someone in their fifties or sixties? To such a good, loving and caring person? I didn't realize the lesson that I had learned that day, but that was the day that I had realized Death can come for anyone.

The years went on and life happened: America was attacked

and I realized that there were people in the world that had true hate for our free country erasing my vision of a happy peaceful world; I grew and started to slowly become the young man I am today, and in this time Death did not come to visit any of my loved ones. It wasn't until early September of my junior year of high school when Death and I almost crossed paths once again. It was a little past midnight on a Tuesday and my older brother, Adam, and I were headed home from Meijer as we went out for some late night shopping for his new apartment in Duluth, Minnesota where he was moving to for his base in the United States Coast Guard. We drove our parents 1994 GMC Suburban, which was a tank of a vehicle, because Adam did not yet have a new vehicle. I remember the rain falling down so hard that night that the window wipers just could hardly keep up. As Adam took the exit ramp off of I-94, I started to doze off because I had been up since early that morning and had school in the next morning; I knew we would be safely home in about ten minutes as we had taken the same path home so many times in our lives. What I remember next

was a blur: I heard my brother's voice shout my name, his arm wrapped around my chest, and then I realized that the car had started to spin. I had no clue what was going on, I had barely woken up and my surroundings brought upon more questions than answers. I felt the back end of the car start to hit things, but that wasn't even my slightest concern; the car spinning was hardly my main concern either; my main concern was when I took a split-second to look down and see that there was no seat belt keeping a savior's grip on me. It was then that I looked out my window to see a huge tree coming into the kamikaze path the car was spinning on—it was also the side and door that I was sitting on with no seatbelt! I was faced with a split-decision of bracing myself for sure and sudden impact, or try to get away from the impact zone. I made the split-second decision and my choice saved me. I threw myself to the driver's side of the car to get myself out of the direct impact zone and when the car hit I was forced to fly back through the air like a ragdoll only to smash back into the passenger side of the car that I had just tried to escape only this time there was no leg room. The whole leg area



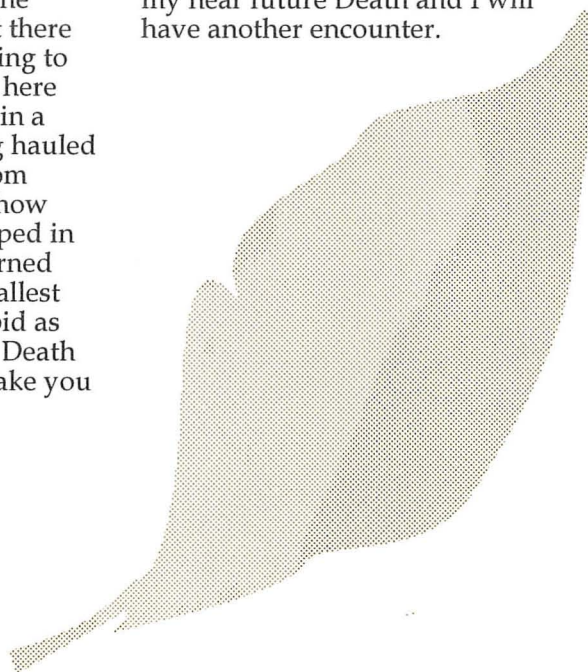
no leg room. The whole leg area of the front passenger side of the car was smashed in by the tree. As soon as we stopped the first words that I heard were from my brother asking me, "Are you okay? Can you walk?" Luckily we both were and could walk.

We both then got out of the car on the driver's side as mine was lodged up against the tree to see the destruction that was done, and when I got out the sight was horrible. There were four or five mailboxes scattered in the road that had been demolished, a giant gap in a man's well-kept shrubs that the Suburban had gone through, and then the Suburban itself; the back end looked as if it had been hit by a wrecking ball, and then the engine block had wrapped around the tree in the area that my legs would have been, and the whole passenger side of the car was destroyed. It wasn't until then that I had finally realized that this wasn't a horrible dream I had, had when I had dozed off—this was real and I had no idea what had caused this car wreck. My brother told me that as he was driving down the road a deer ran out into the road and he slammed on his breaks as hard as he could and turned into the other lane to avoid the

deer, which caused the car to start hydroplaning and begin to spin out of control—it was in this time that he wrapped his arm around me and I jumped across the car. We called our parents and told them what had happened and to come help us, seeing as we were a quarter mile away from our home, and then we called the police who brought paramedics. During the whole time I answered the officer's questions in a daze, the scene all seemed so surreal. A paramedic was putting a band aid over a cut that I got in the ordeal and told me that by my brother waking me up and me being able to jump across the car, that I had saved my legs from being amputated and even possibly my life from the blood that I would have lost in the time that it would have taken the paramedics to arrive. I sat there in utter shock contemplating to myself that I could not be here right now, and I could be in a cold black body bag being hauled off to the city morgue. From that moment of realizing how close I came to being grasped in Death's cold grip, I've learned to appreciate even the smallest things in life, and as morbid as this may sound, to accept Death because it can come and take you

away whenever it pleases.

Now as I'm sitting here in this chair typing this paper in this heated room filled with my family, the room still feels cold. The sounds of constant rhythmic beeping fill the room, people are praying that they don't turn into a constant ring and turn to a flat line, the sound of footsteps are constantly coming by the doorway, and the slow shallow breaths that seem so quiet and quaint are those of my Grandfather who is sleeping in the bent hospital bed. I sit here wondering if Death will be the next guest to walk into the room and take my Grandfather. I am not sure if tomorrow brings a day of tragedy or another day of happiness, but I know that my time is limited with him, and in my near future Death and I will have another encounter.

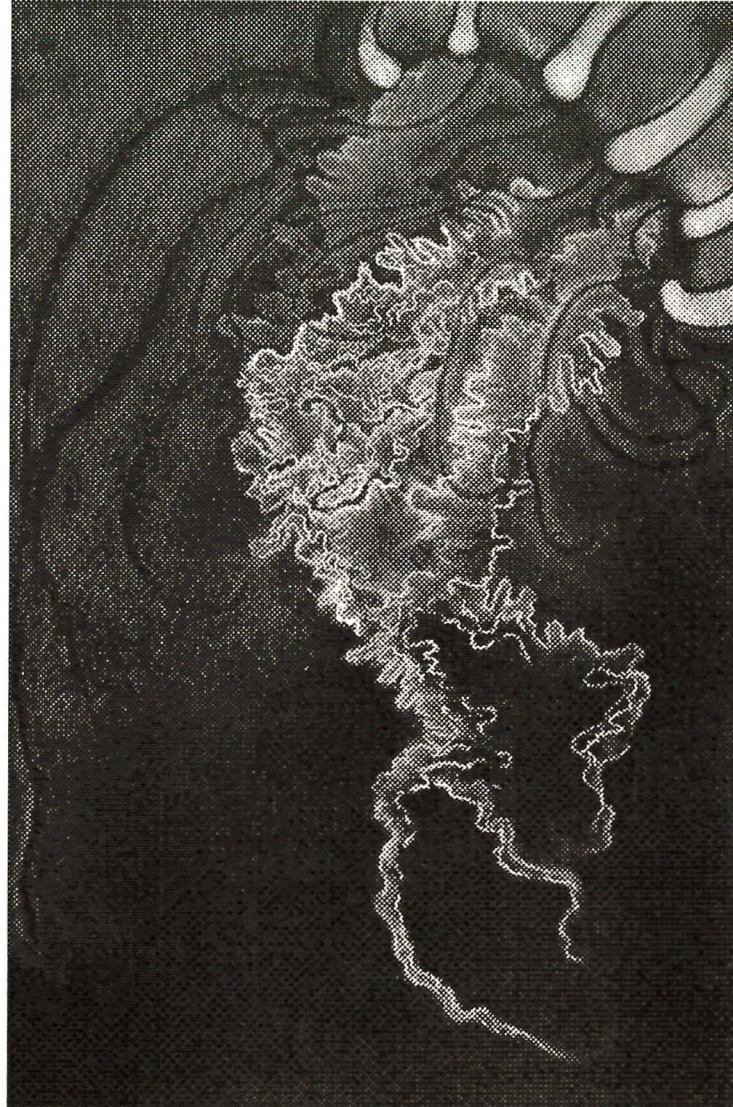


Merited Art

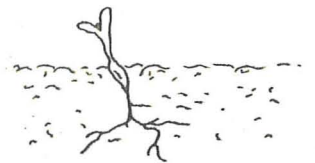
ETHEREAL PHANTOM

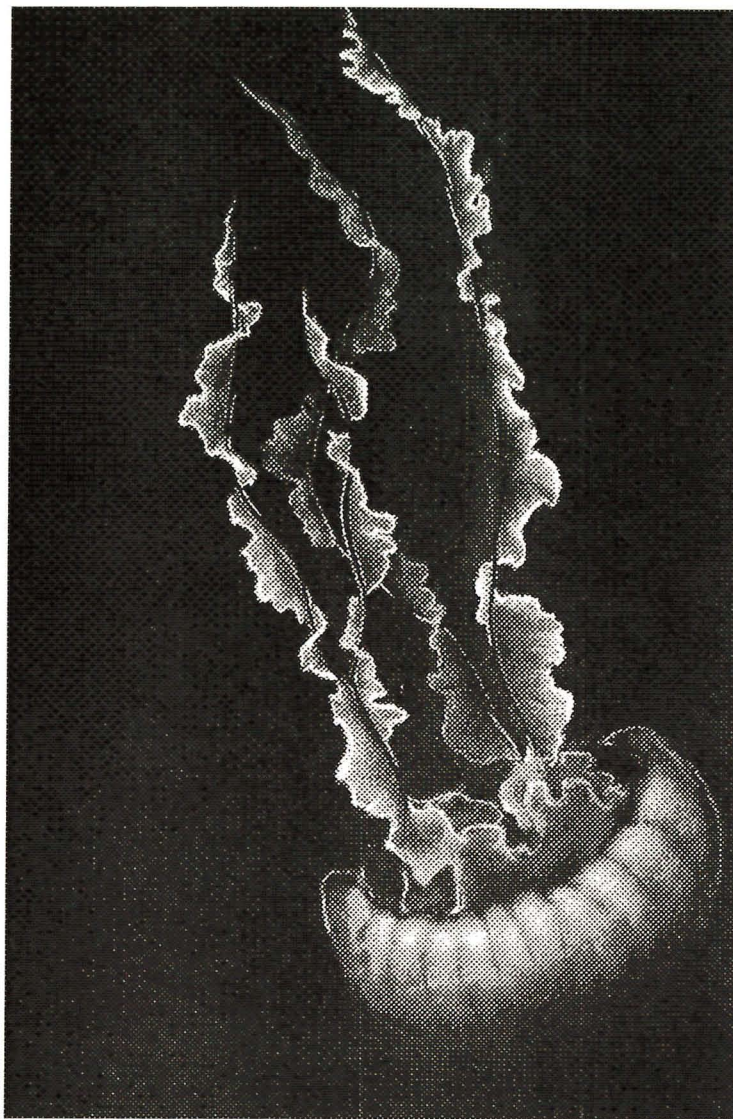
45

amanda stuben



Honorable Mention





amanda stuben

GRACEFUL IMMOLATION

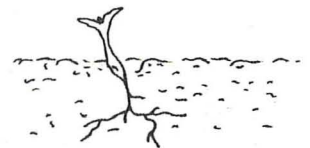
GRACEFUL INCIPIENCY

47

amanda stuben



Selection of Merit



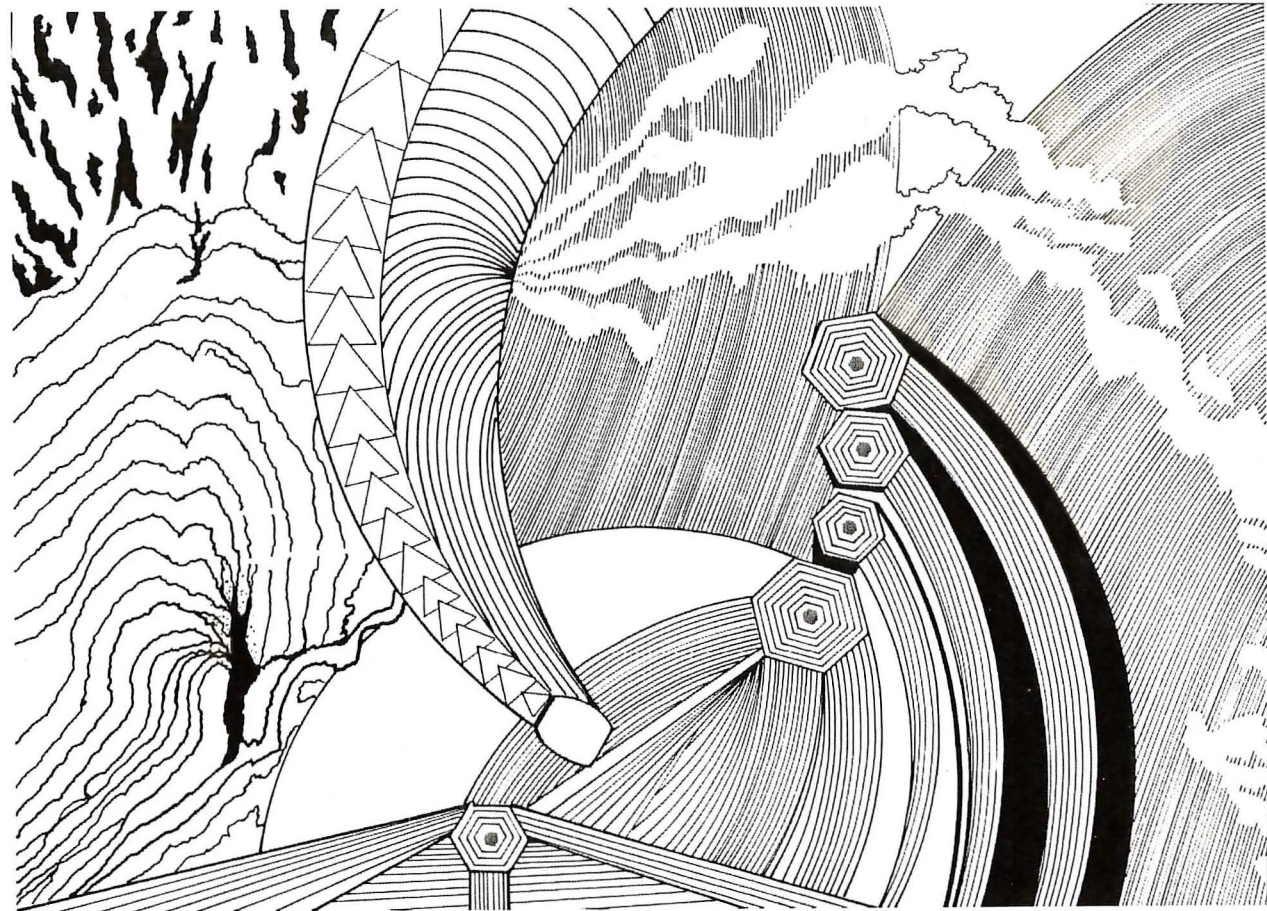


andi manuilow

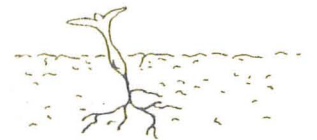
NOT WRAPPED TOO TIGHT

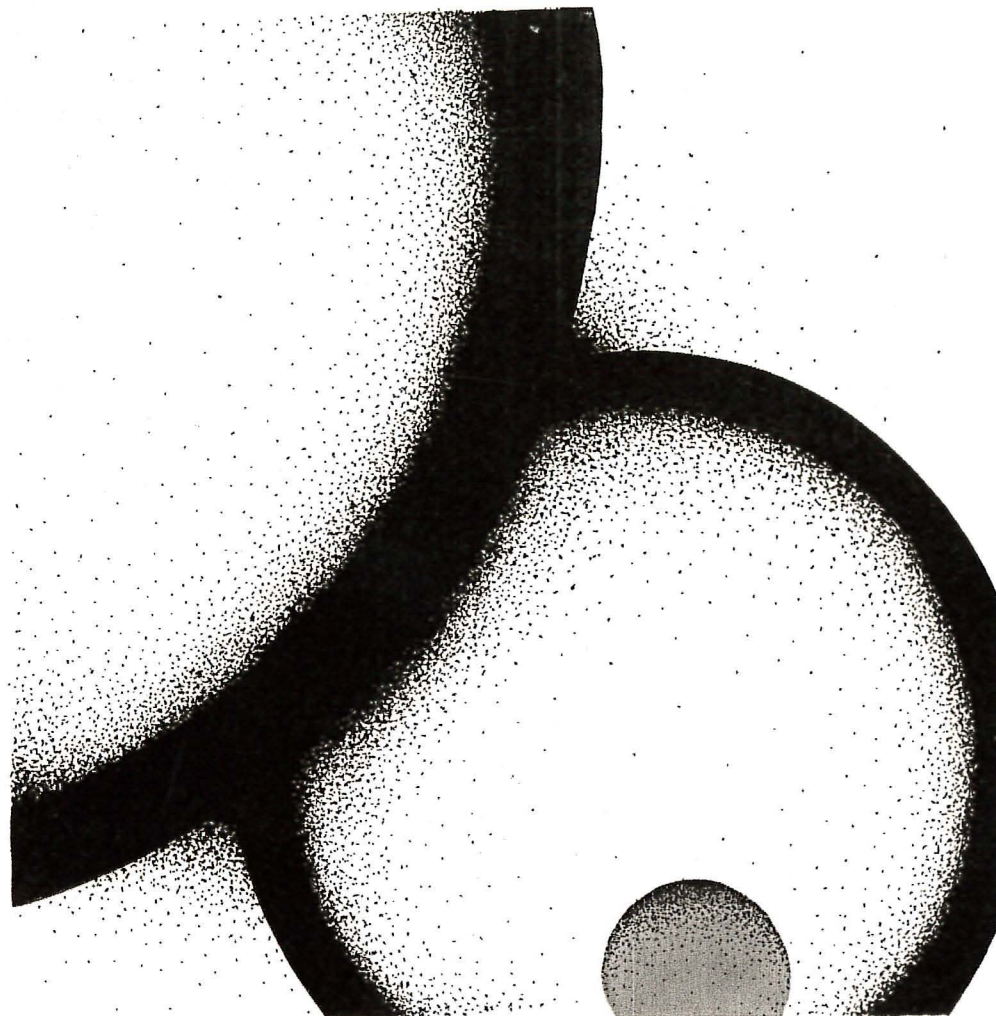
BARNACLES AT SIX FATHOMS 49

brent peever



Selection of Merit





andrew jorde

DISSORIENTATION

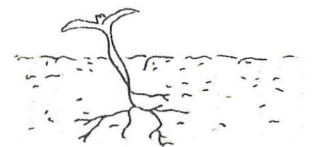
SPOTLESS

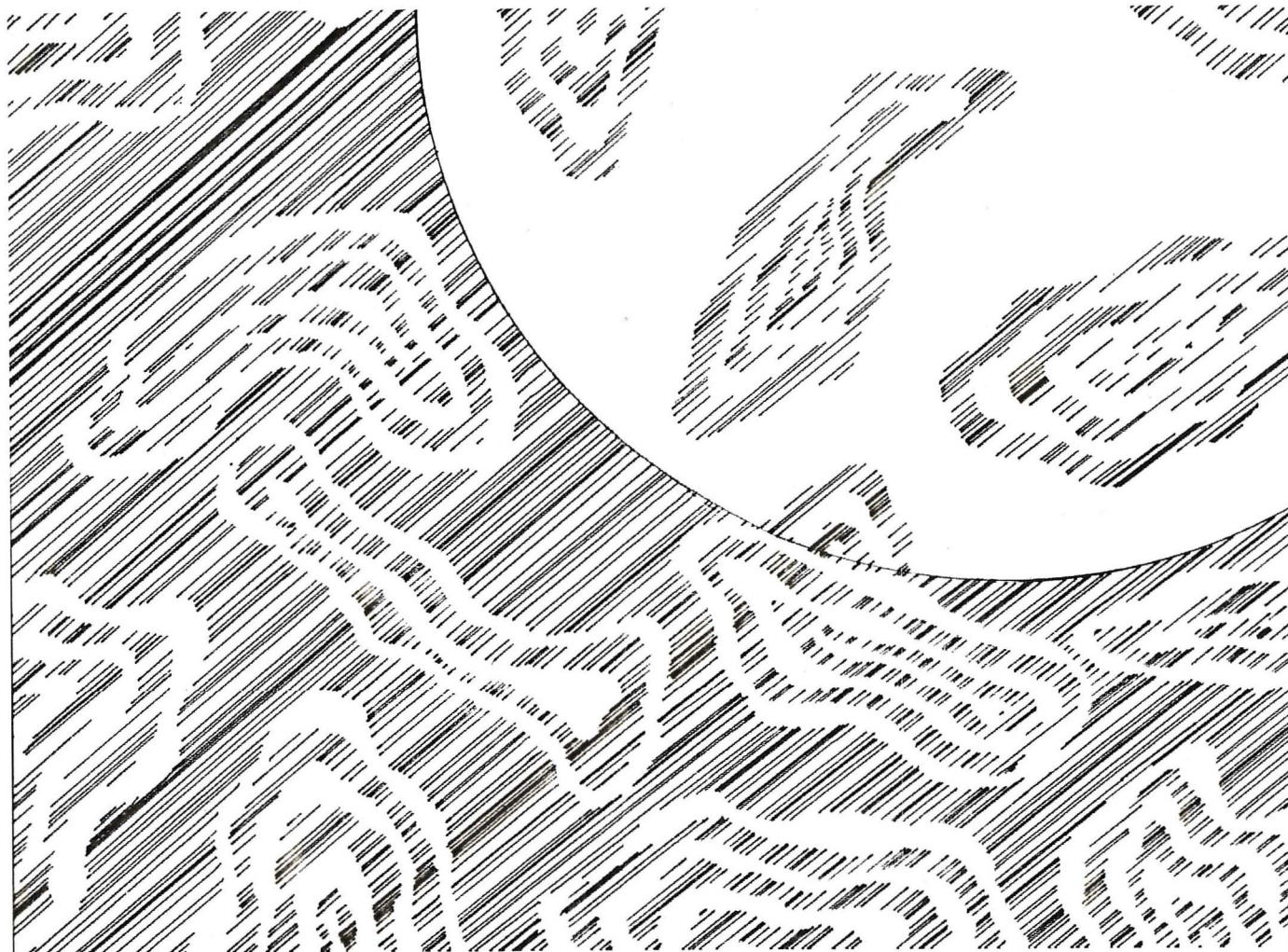
andrew jorde

51



Honorable Mention



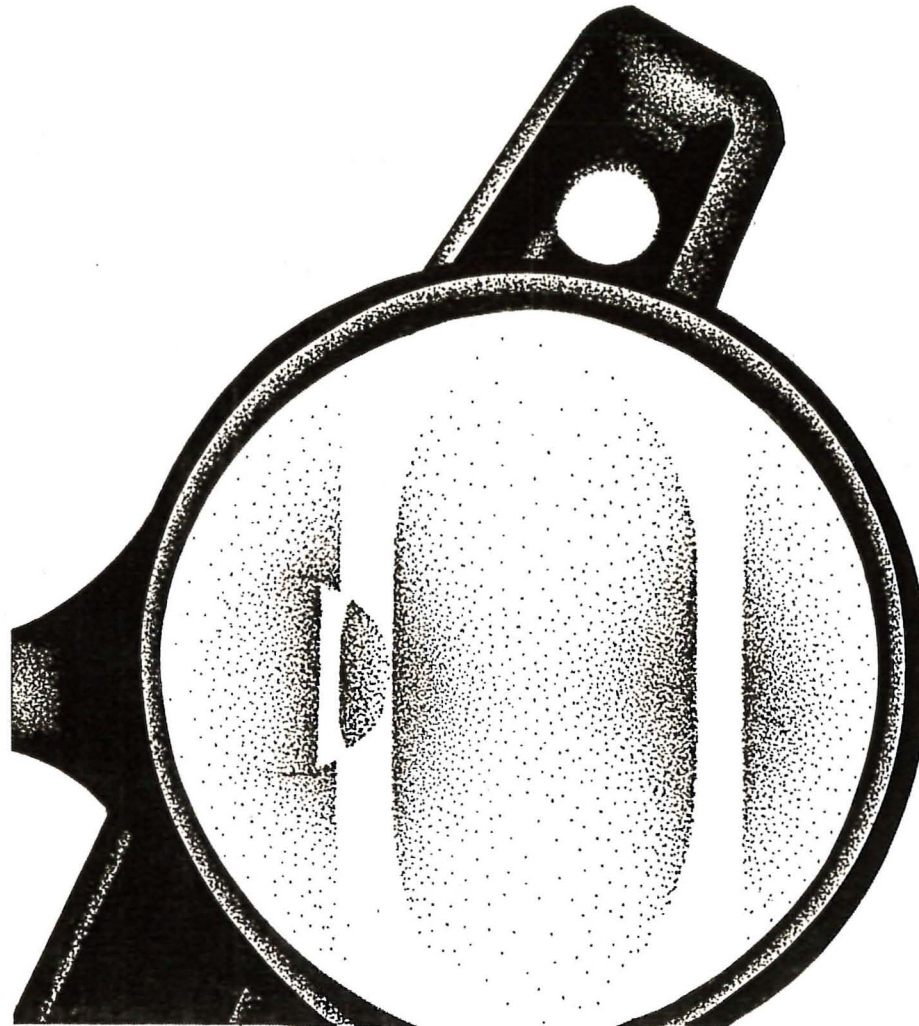


andrew jorde
THE OUTER SIDE

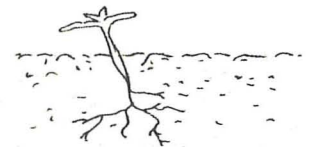
BULLSEYE

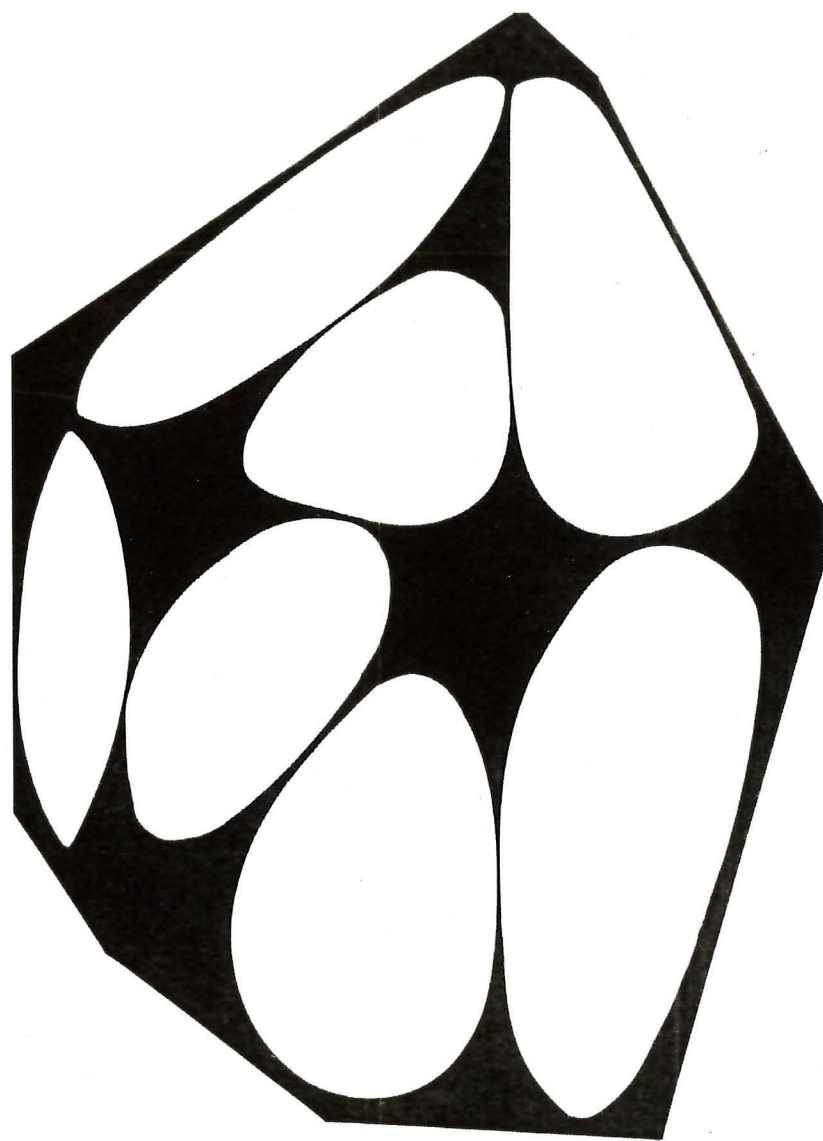
andrew jorde

53



Selection of Merit





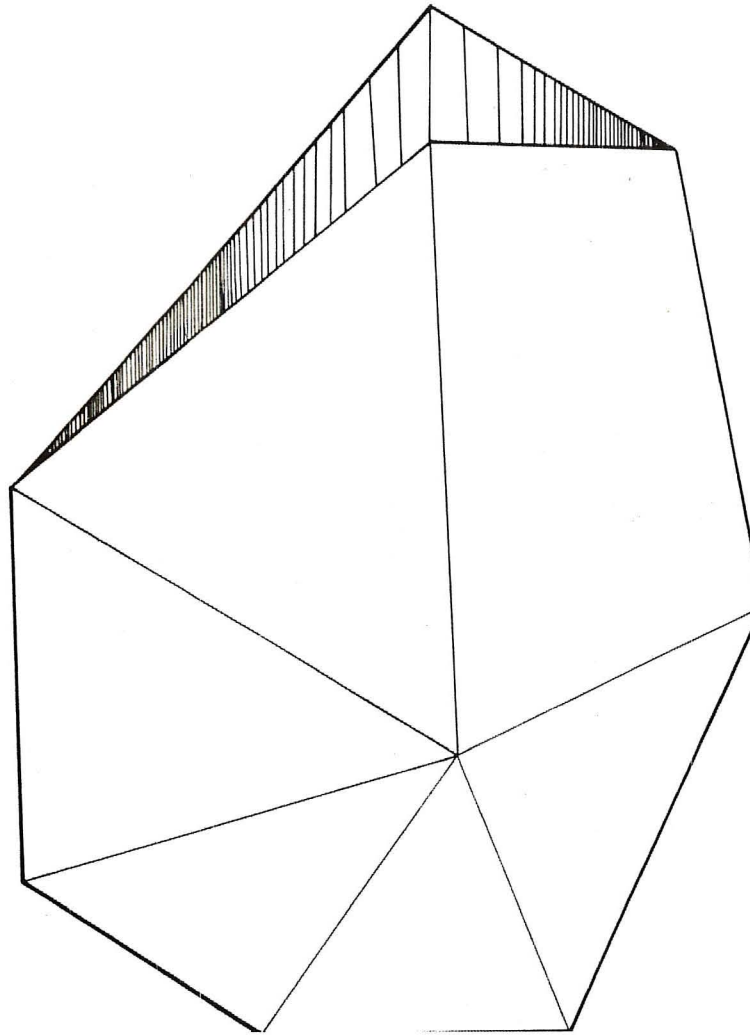
david shagena

OIL AND WATER

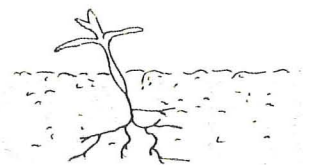
FACETS

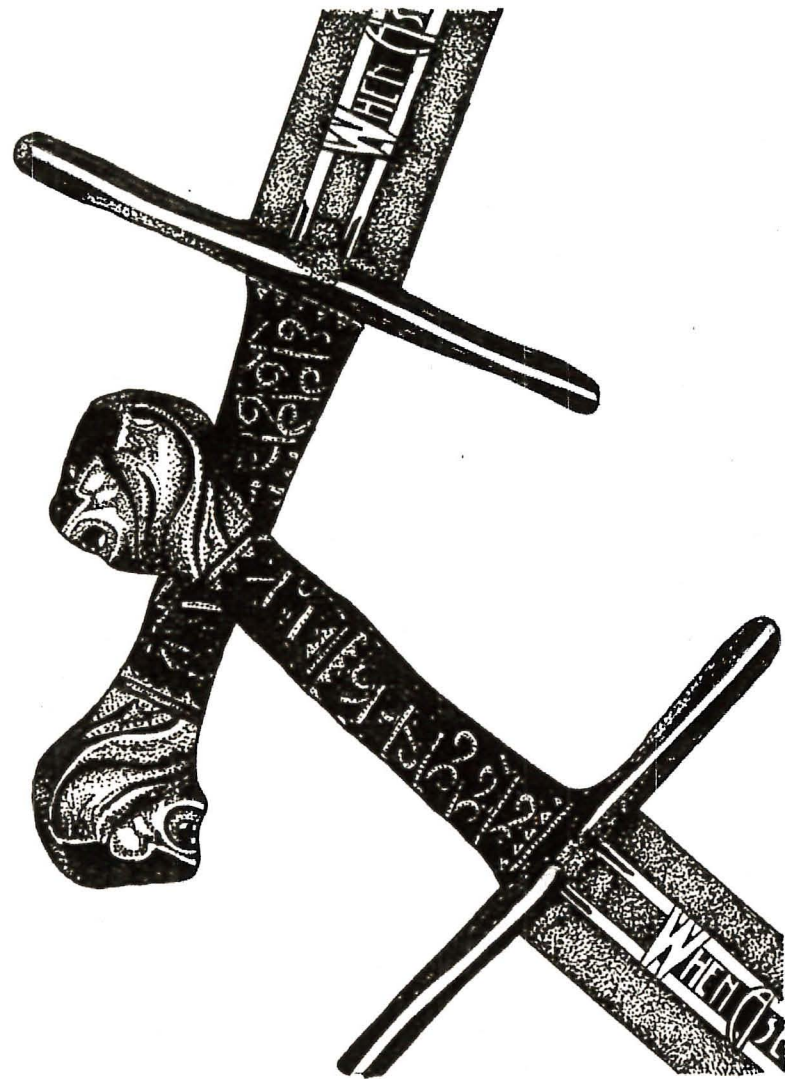
david shagena

55



Selection of Merit



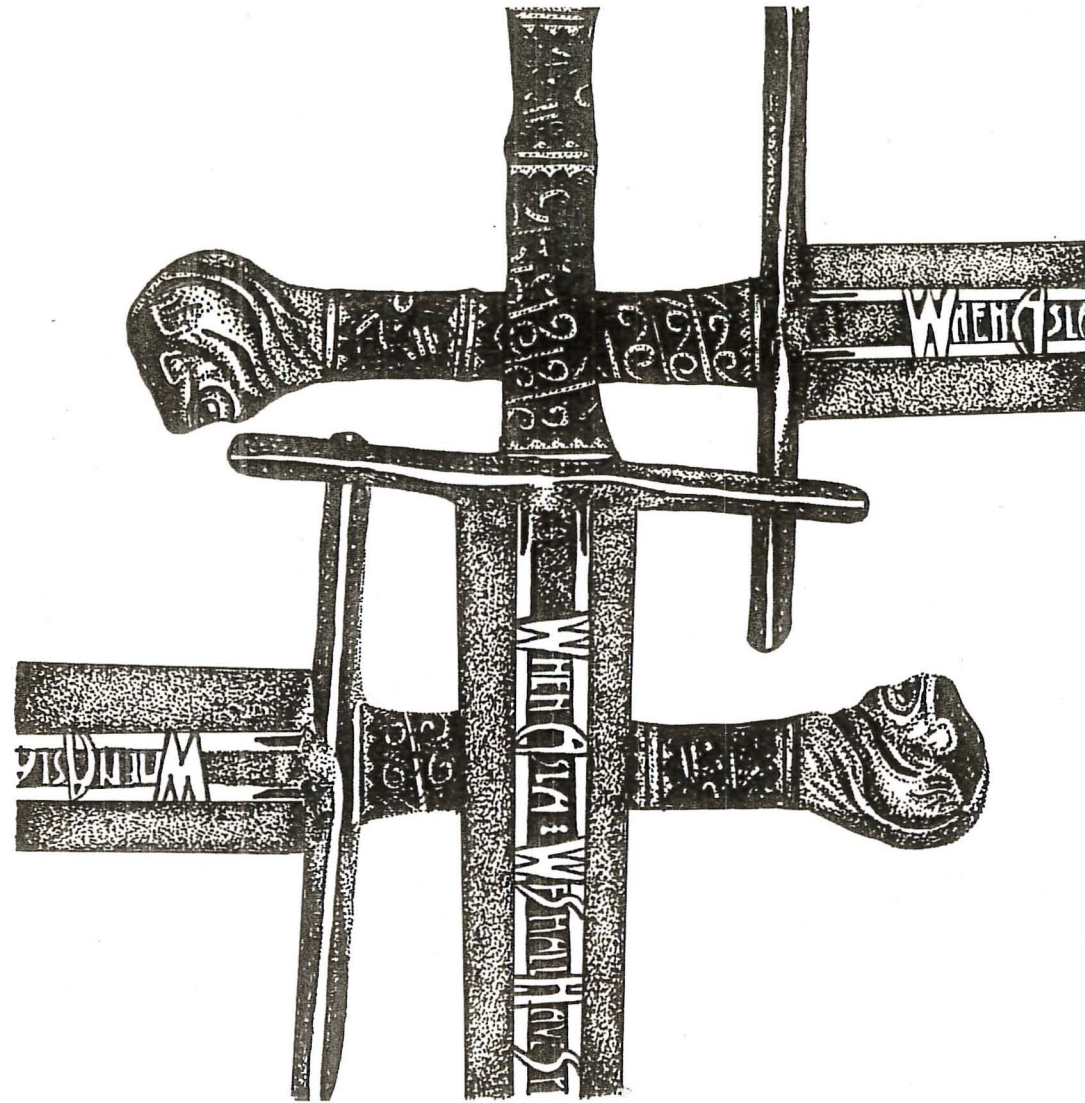


elisabeth peters
ILLIAD

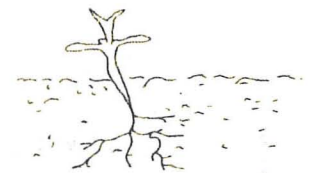
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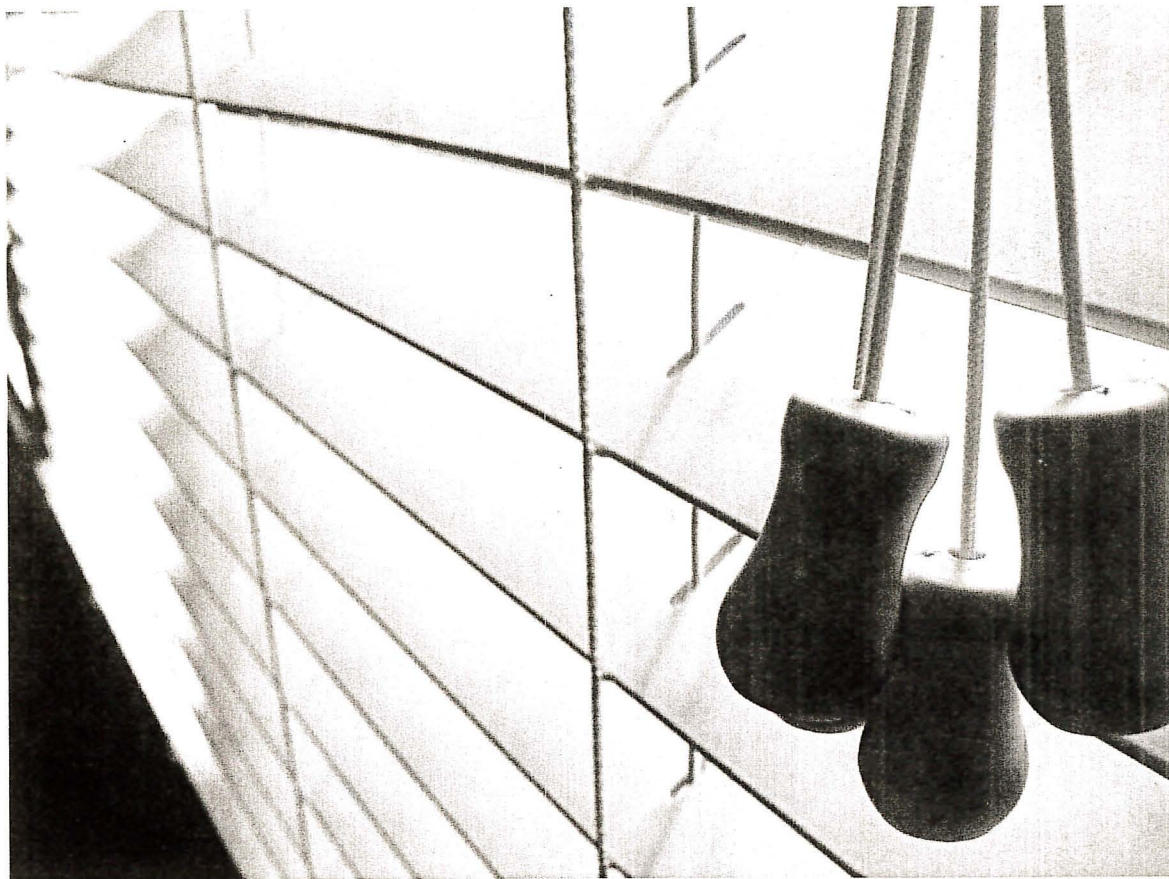
elisabeth peters

57



Selection of Merit



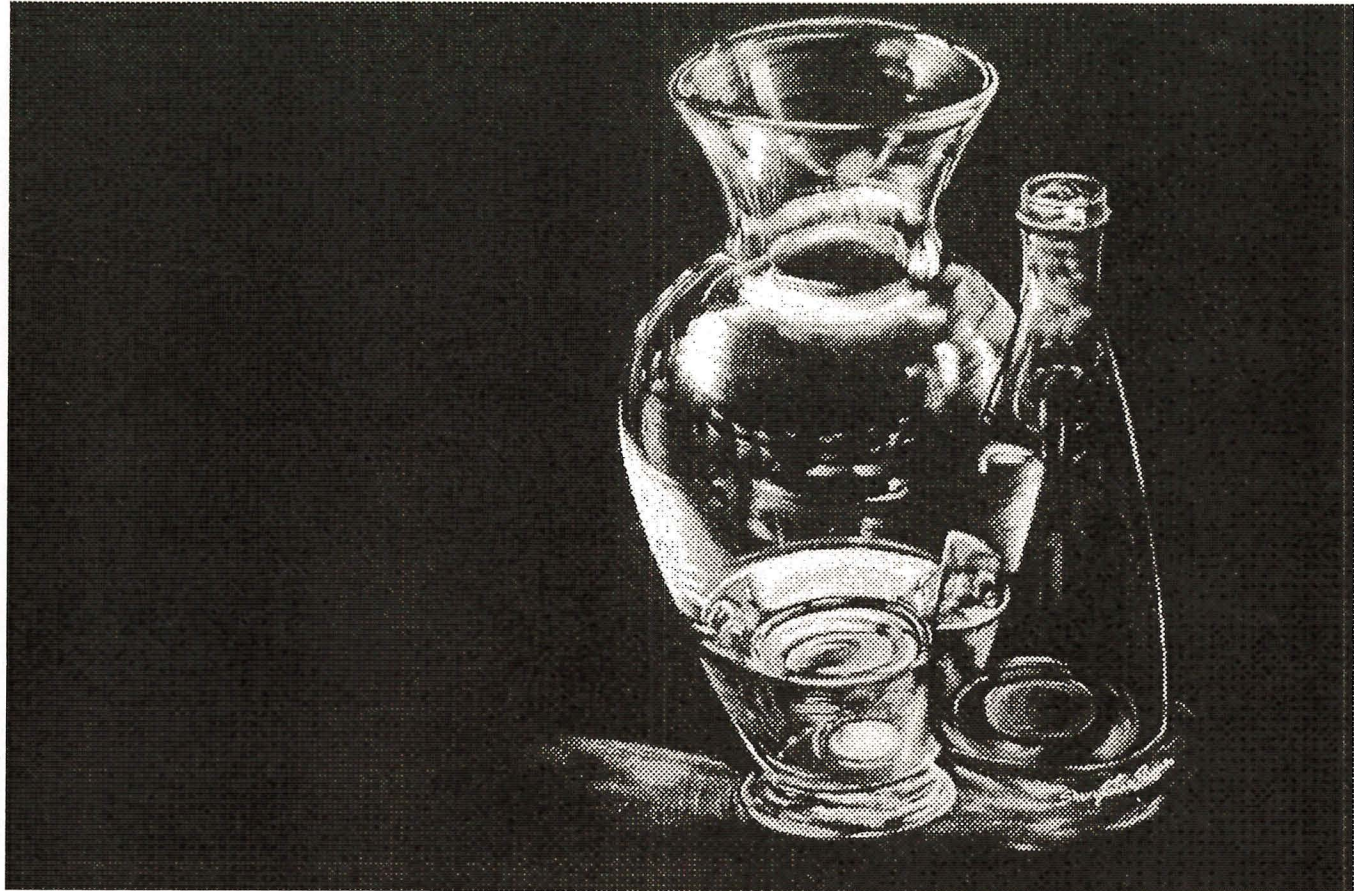


erica a. derue
IN DEPTH

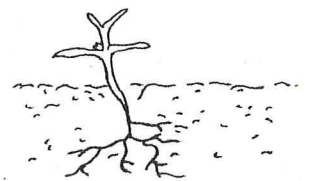
RING OF BRIGHT WATER

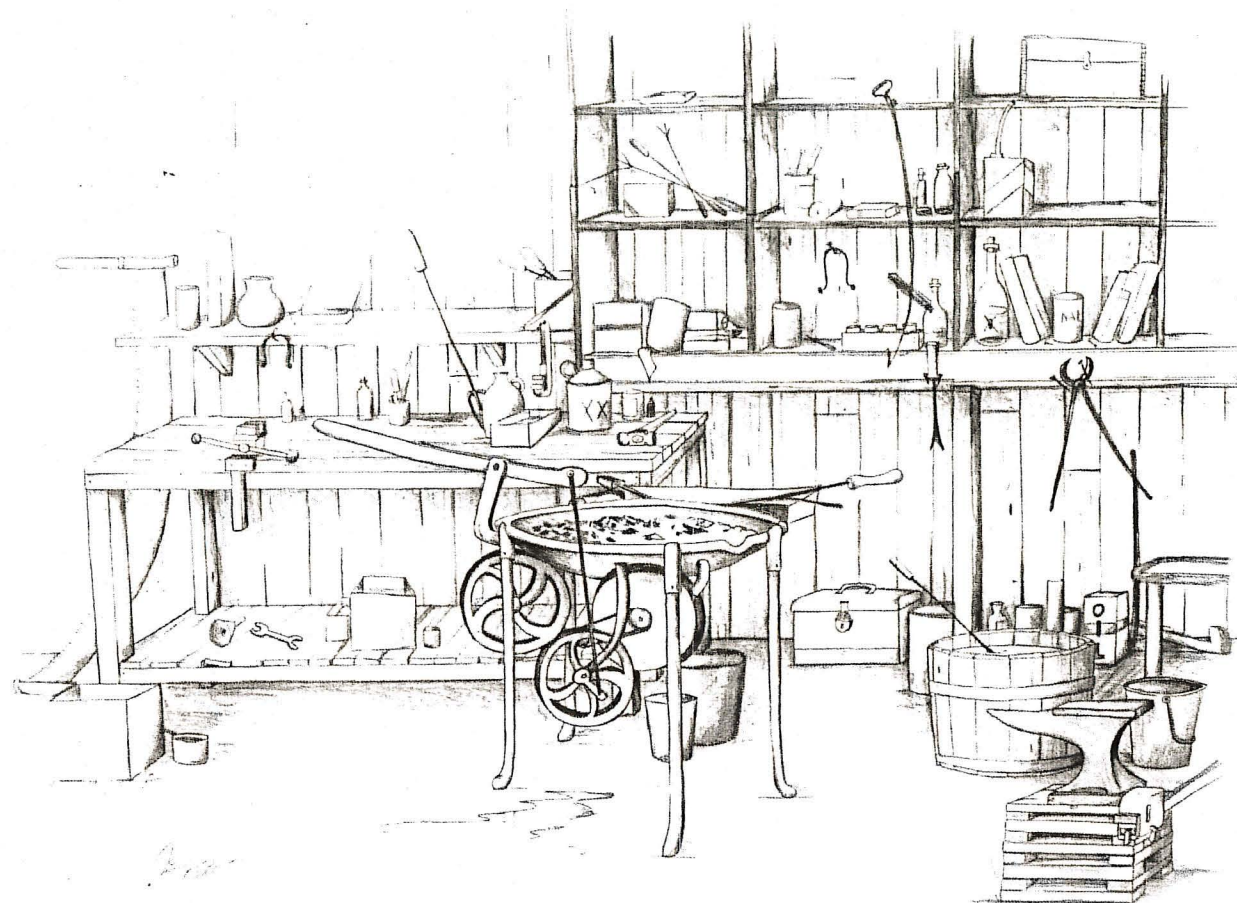
59

sheryl penzien



Selection of Merit





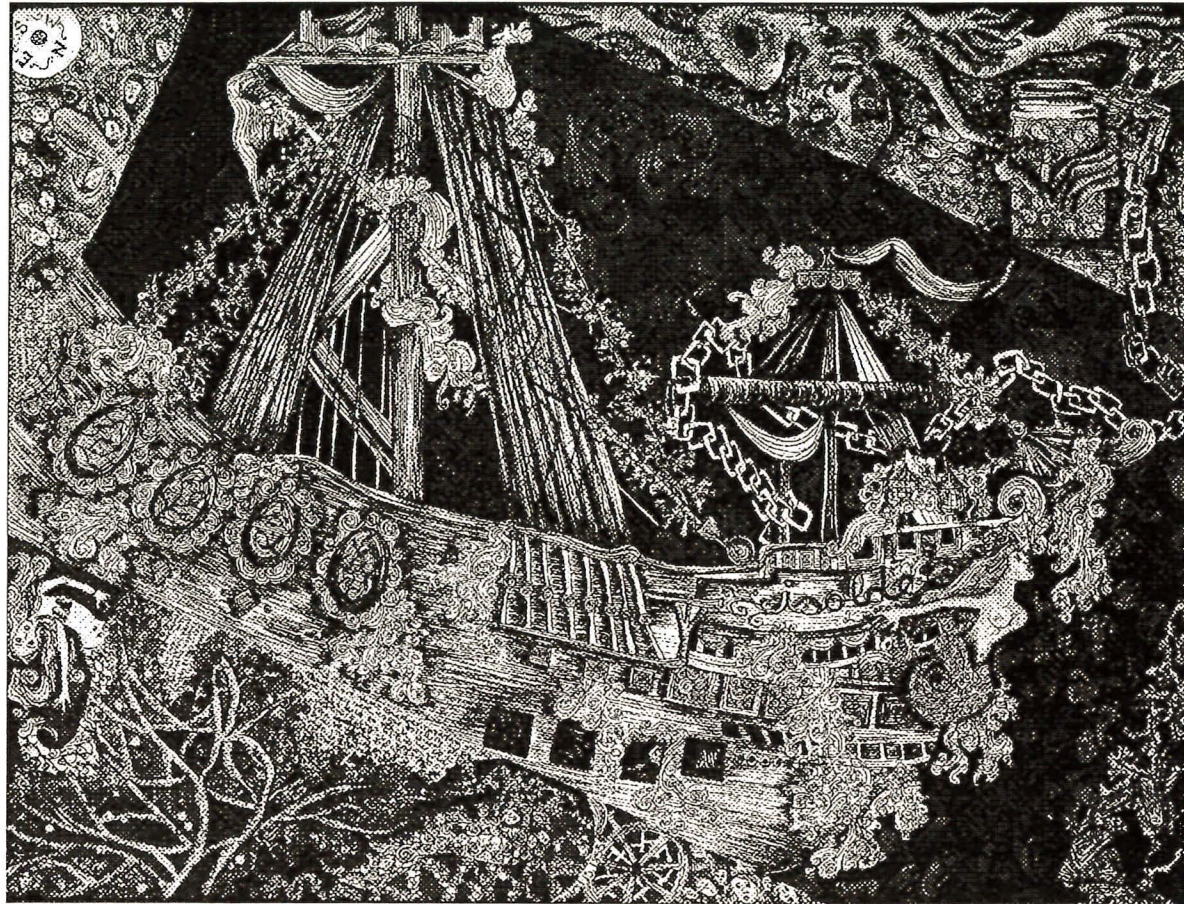
james mitchell

THE OLD SHOP

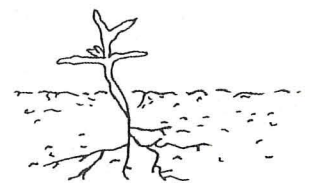
UNDERWATER HAUNTINGS

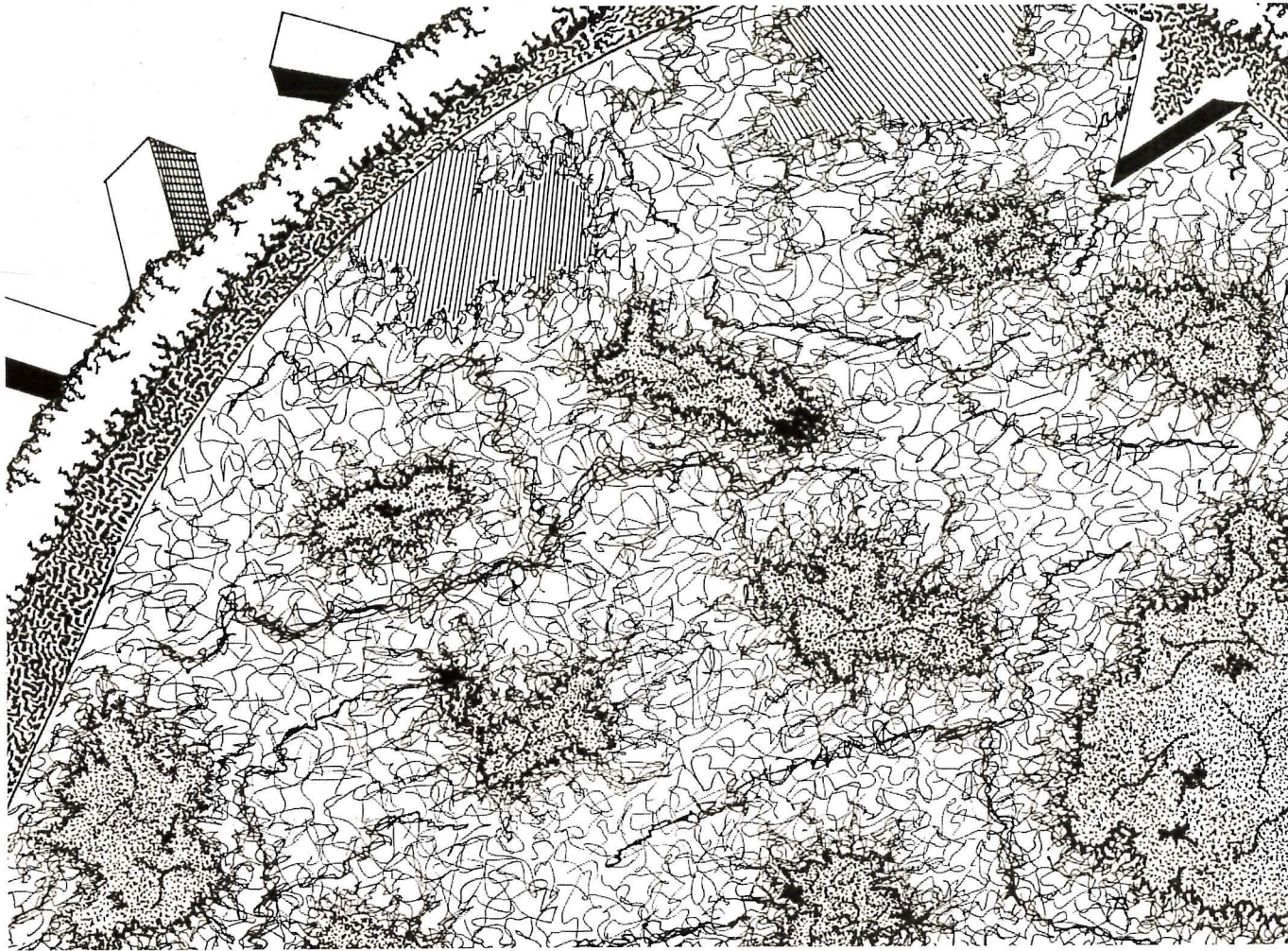
61

lauren cross



Selection of Merit





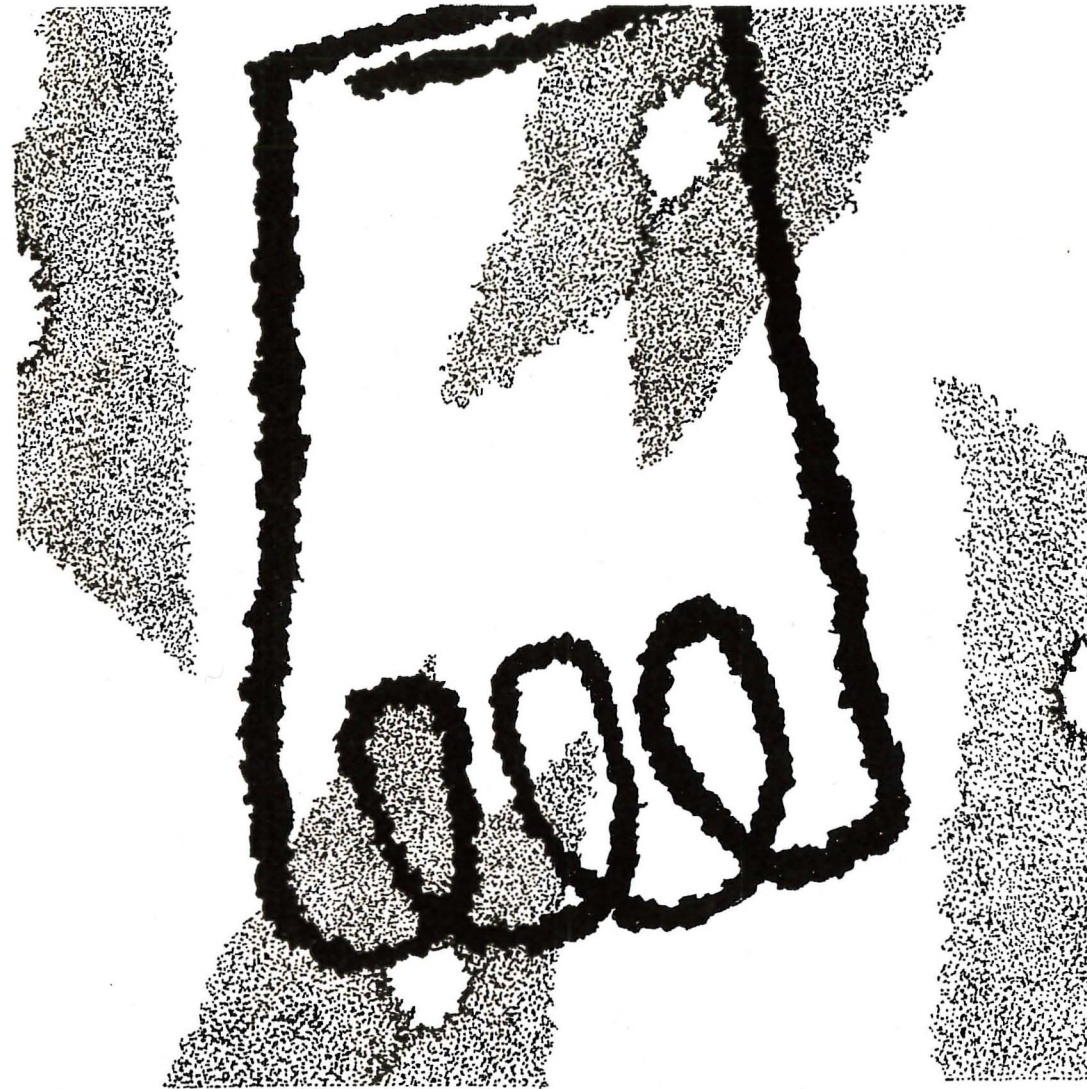
jan hall

BENEATH THE GEM

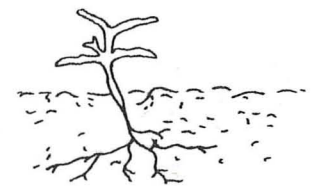
SPRINGTIME

jan hall

63



Selection of Merit





jenny walker

THE NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN

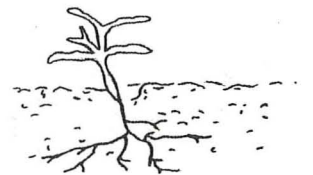
BIRDS IN FLIGHT

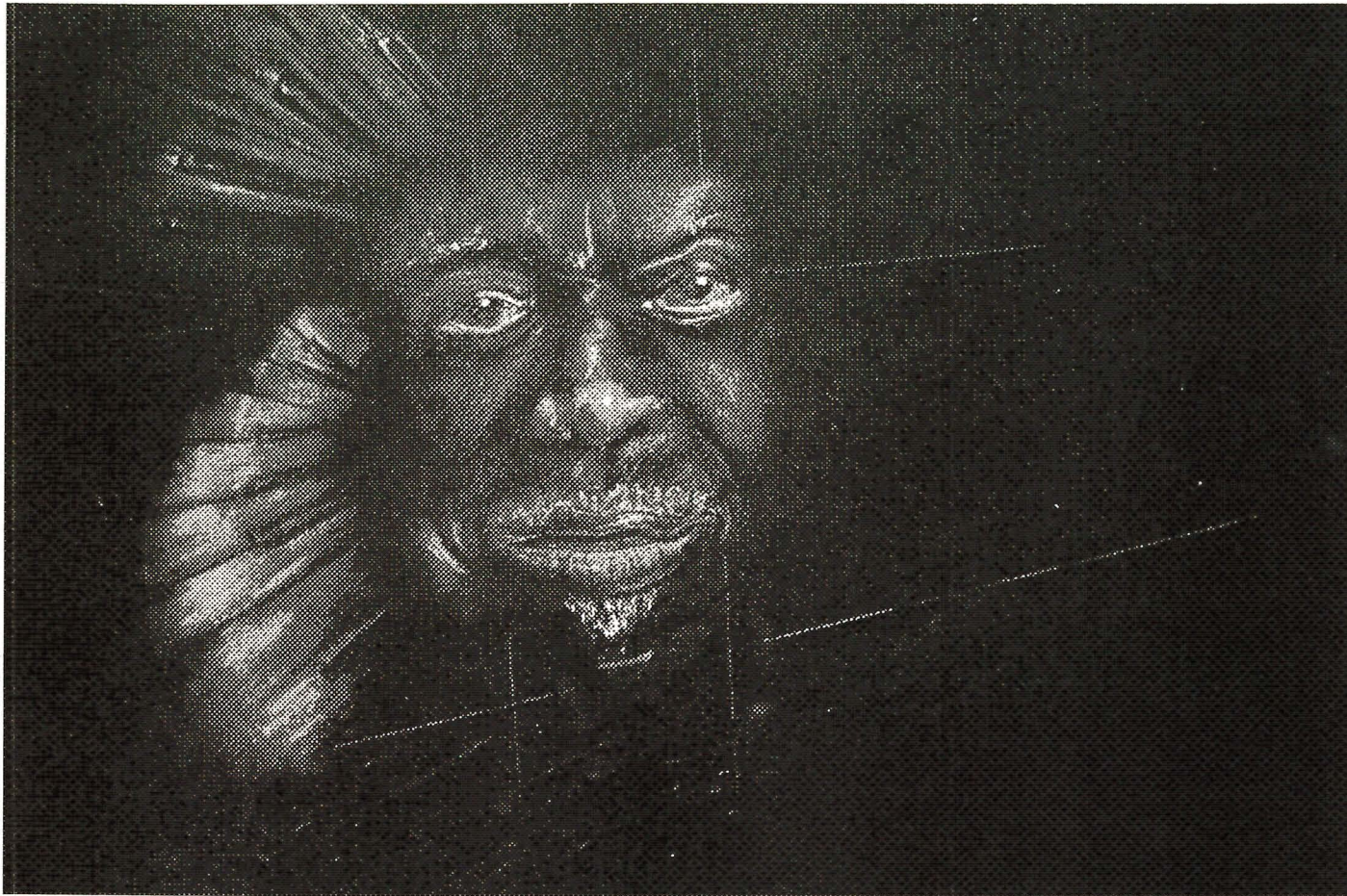
65

jenny walker



Selection of Merit





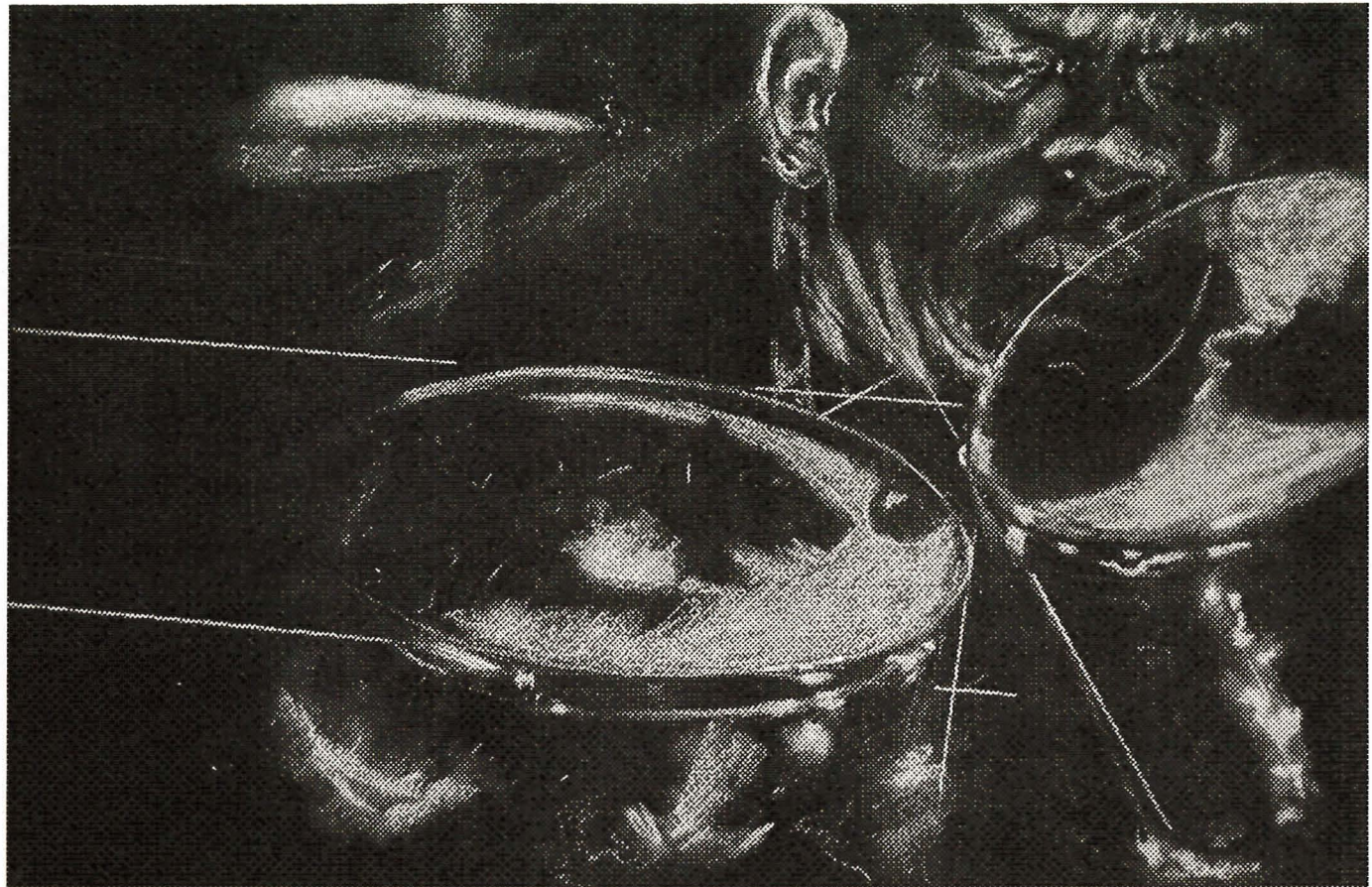
justin linne

INTRINSIC

RELEVANCE

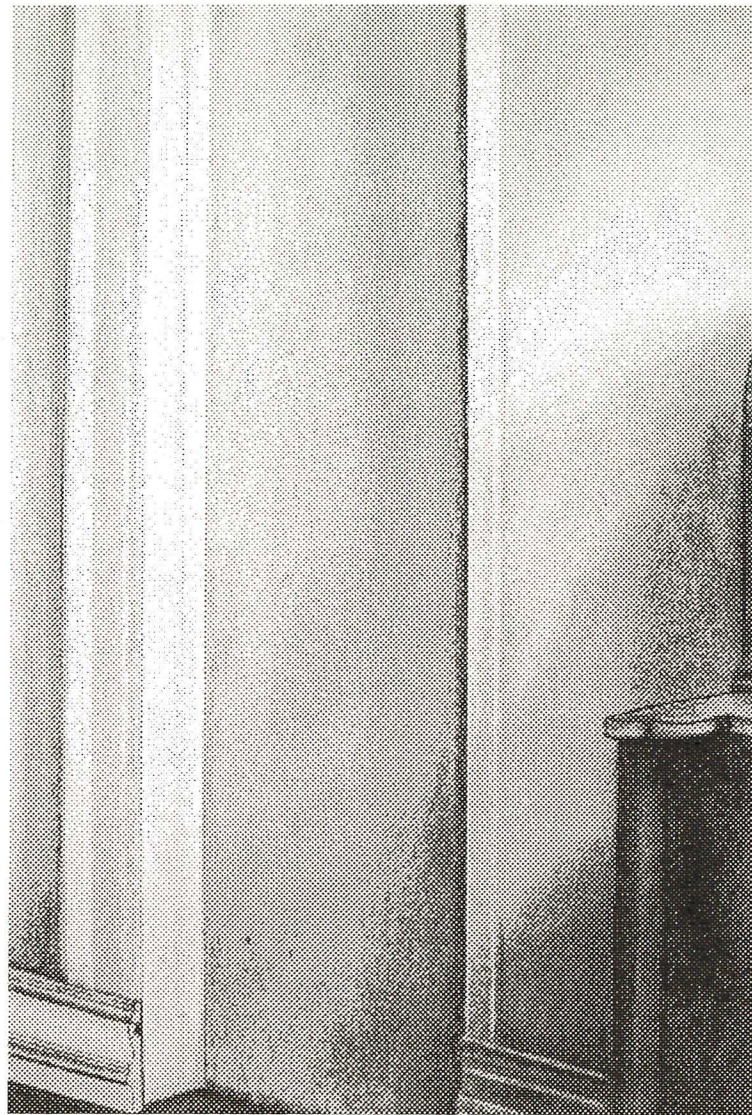
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justin linne



Selection of Merit





therese padgham

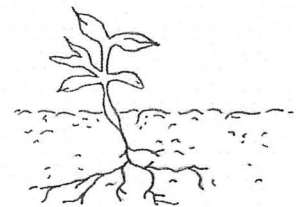
TWILIGHT

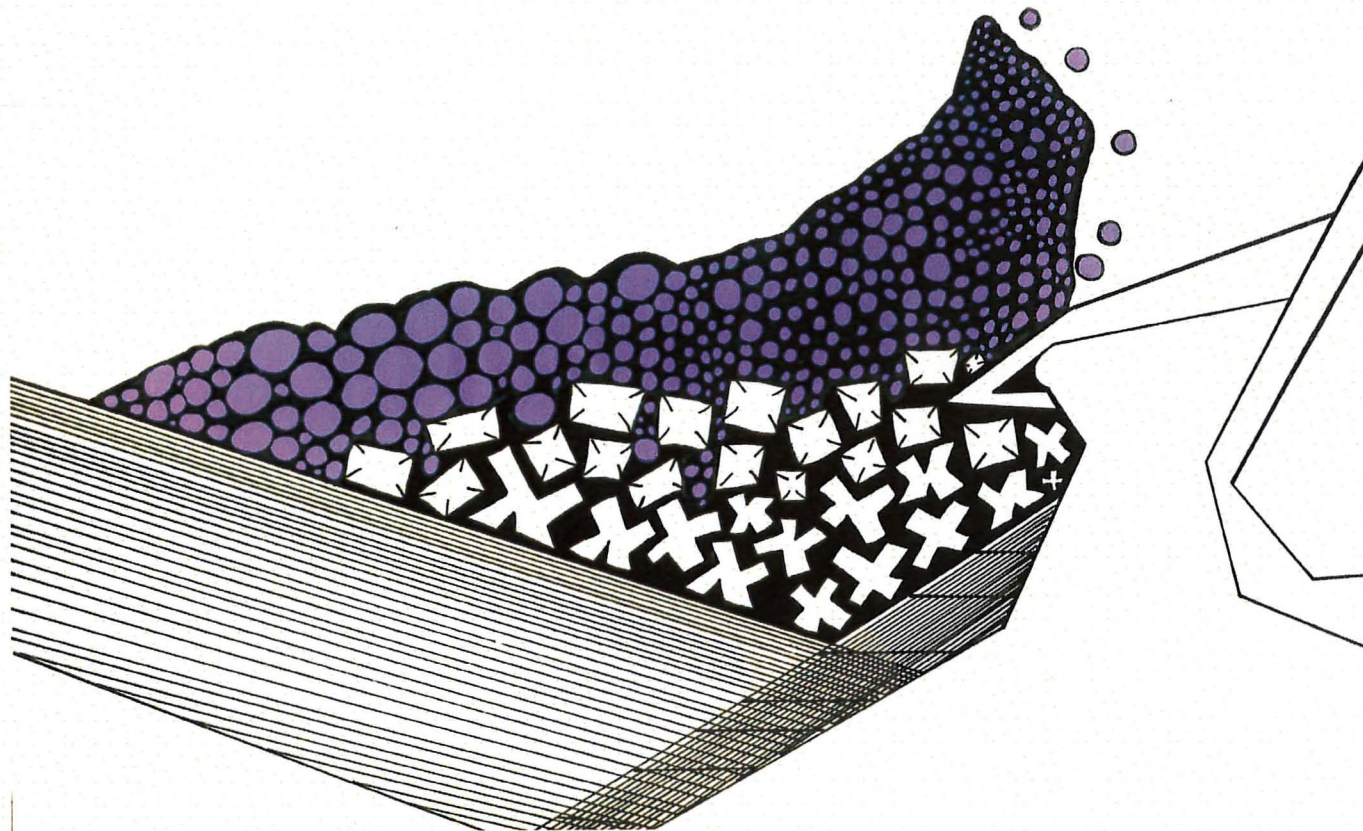
LEMONS ARE PINK & CRABS ARE BLUE 69

estelle scheaffer



Selection of Merit





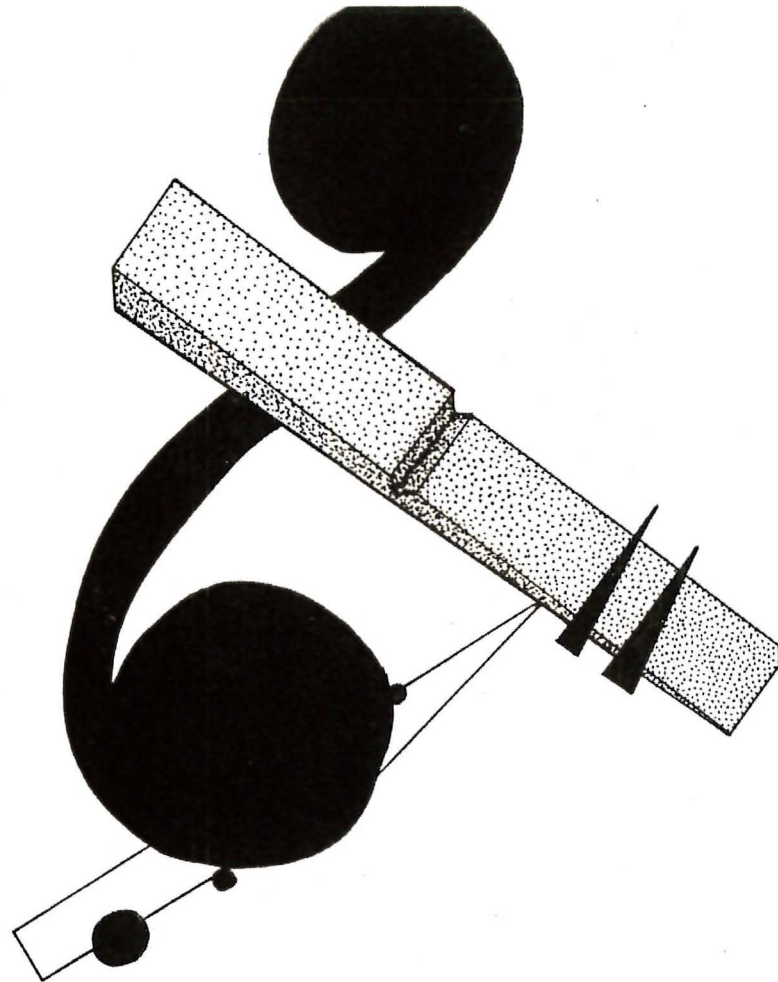
zachary penzien

THE GRAPES ARE A TRAP

NEW ORLEANS

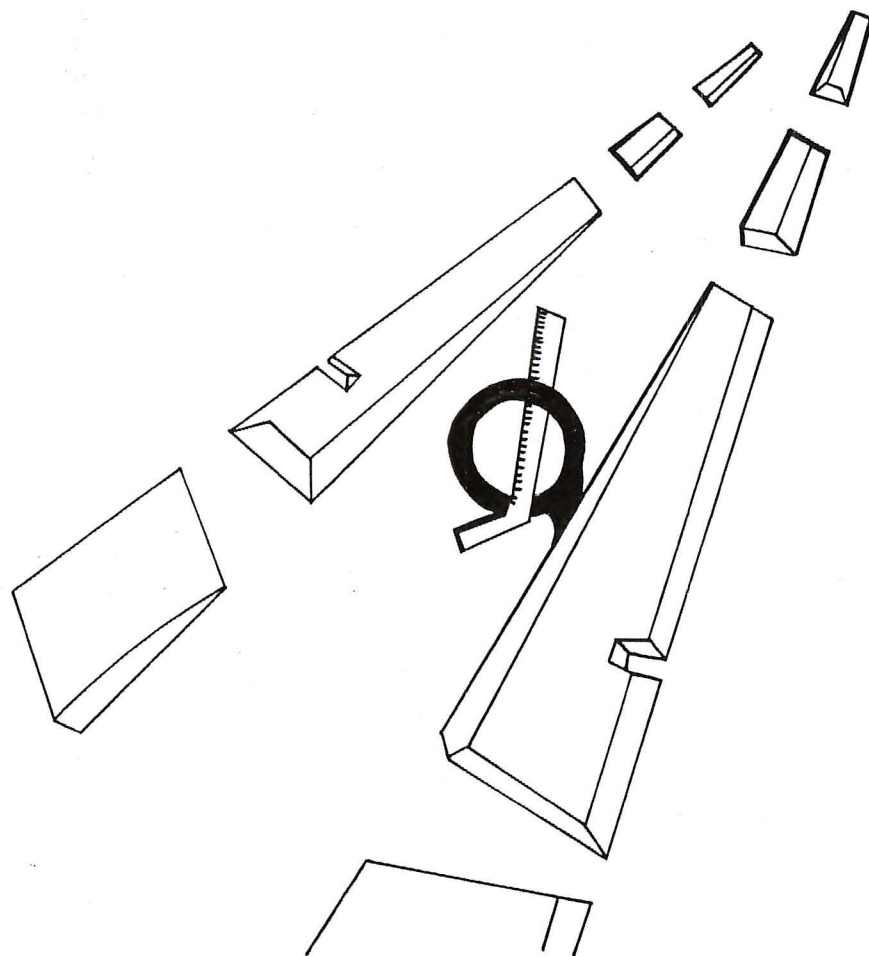
zachary penzien

71



Selection of Merit





zachary penzien
NEW YORK

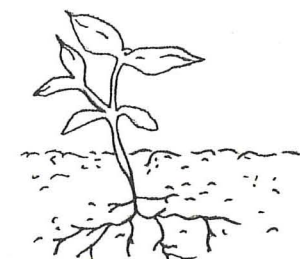
ROSWELL

zachary penzien

73



Selection of Merit





Merited Writing

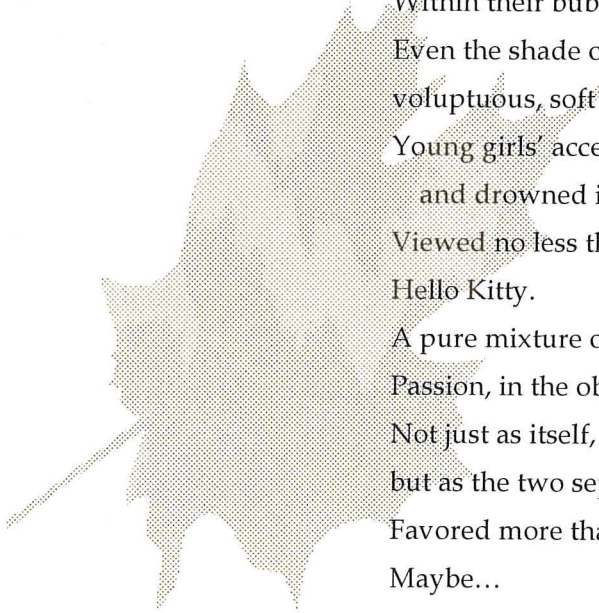


PINK

chealse bowers

Selection of Merit

77



Strewn across the walls of little girls' rooms.
Sewn into their tutus, and boas.
Within their bubble gum, and lip gloss.
Even the shade of their lips,
voluptuous, soft and tender.
Young girls' accessories are soaked, are drenched,
and drowned in its pigments.
Viewed no less than fluffy, and charming.
Hello Kitty.
A pure mixture of the bow, and the kitty.
Passion, in the objects surrounding us everyday,
Not just as itself,
but as the two separate hues that make it.
Favored more than any other color?
Maybe...



I WAIT FOR THE ELEGANT DANCE, that momentary hush when the smooth warm steel slides delicately under my finger. The blood gently thrums in my ears, silencing the sparse traffic on the street below. Reflexively calm and measured, I release my breath...like I've done a thousand times before.

Lost in the moment, I don't hear the kiss of the 8mm. The graceful instrument soundly thumps in my palms, coinciding with the first belt of lightning and thunder. As I look up, the dark clouds rumble threateningly. The scaffolding shakes and rumbles as I'm blinded momentarily by the coming storm. The first spatters of summer rain caress my cheek as the thunderhead spasms and the clouds open violently. The pent-up torrent unleashes from above with a brilliant flash and thunderous collision of lightning striking the storm vein.

Lying prone, I recover from the cracking and creaking of my cathedral top perch. Quickly, I stow my tools in the oversized carpenter's bag. Stepping, sliding, and fumbling off the slats and rungs, quickly dropping

down to the now empty street. Even in the sudden rain, I feel the cobblestones echoing under my heels. I duck into the alleyway south of the church, head down, fully avoiding the pounding rain at this point. After only a few steps, I nearly tumble over His Eminence of Saint Theotokos Cathedral, the Metropolitan Viljem Kranjec.

Abruptly stopped from my flight, I smile in embarrassment at His Eminence. Even in the suddenly horrific weather, he's still dressed in all his opulence, all ornate gold, and stark white linens. He regards me closely and then he looks up in the sky... he laughs softly, "It appears God's grace is with you today, Nikola..."

I nod in response, "Thank you, Your Eminence, the scaffolding was becoming treacherous." I nod again, feigning worry toward the clouds.

"Go on Nikola, the windows can wait until after the storm." His vowels linger of a Turkish accent, not unusual in the regional capitol, but oddly out of place for a Metropolitan. As he finishes, his words are

punctuated by another sundering crack of lightning.

"Thank you, Your Eminence." I shout over the sudden storm, then smile and nod, stepping past the man of God, and quickly head down the alley toward my apartment.

I look back and notice Metropolitan Kranjec watching after me. I make no notice of it toward him, but I am left with an odd feeling about the chance encounter. It is something inside me, like a memory at the edge of thought, but I cannot place, as I scuttle away from the venerable church.

I take a meandering course back to my apartment, following the local alleyways and narrow streets. I'm struck by the odd silence, the lack of human trespass amid the summer storm. The dusty and crumbling brick, the dingy windows of the bleak city seemed to close in around me. The somber buildings remind me of my trade and the trouble here. The whole of the city seems a peculiar microcosm of the Austro Empire, with its economic and political struggles.

Exiting the last alleyway closest

Selection of Merit

darrin r. rushing

A SUMMER DAY

to the apartment, I see and feel the mud caked and spattered half way up each shin. Walking over to a downspout, I sluice off the excessive dross from my pants and boots. I can hear the faintly echoing beat of heels, the noise of thumping and sloshing, heading away toward the center of the city. The memory of their passing ricochets through the damp narrow alley. I pause, and almost laugh, the after-effects of my metered waltz seems to be drawing attention already.

Checking for passers-by, I enter my apartment silently, securing the door and closing the blinds. I casually rid myself of the rain soaked vestiges of my glazier's uniform and don more pedestrian dungarees and a waist coat of canvas. Due to a fortunate accident, the local train was delayed about two hours today...allowing me to complete my labor and find easy transport out of Sarajevo and back to Saint Petersburg.

Entering the closet of my bedroom to collect the rest of my belongings, I remove the false baseboards. I pull the 'tool chest' from its hidden cove. Two

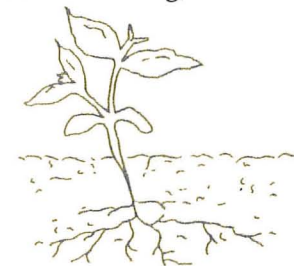
months earlier, when I rented the flat, I had needed secrecy. I found the closet floor to be ideal for that purpose. One of the advantages of having tools and training of a craftsman is the ability to make nearly invisible changes to something. Only a professional of the trade might notice the changes I've made. As I looked for a place for my vault, I discovered that the closet floor had been made from sturdy but irregular boards. The flooring was tedious, but easily removed. Within a day, I had fashioned the two meter pine box and the now false floor that covered the secreted chamber. The heavy flannel along the framework and a few braces kept any abnormal creaking, or stray light from drawing suspicion to visitors... had they the reason or chance to enter the long closet.

After I place the layered trays of tools and supplies on the bed, I use the key hung about my neck to unlock each of the five separate inlaid locks. I turn the cylinders to their respective homes, remembering each position of the unmarked ten position locks. Opening the case, I remove the

felt cover, and place the cleaning oils, bore kit, and assembly tools of my favorite dancing partner.

Retracting the receiver, I gently remove the single 8mm casing, still warm at the ends of my fingers from the day's exertions. Chuckling silently to myself, perhaps its arrogance, but I've never put more than one round in the internal magazine. If the challenger happened to escape from the reach of my partner's fingers, then God had meant them to fulfill another purpose. As I reviewed today's events, tenderly deconstructing the 8mm, I place the stock into its bed of felt and teak.

The door emits a muffled crack, nearly silent, but obviously broken as the oaken door rasps harshly against its frame. Still in bare feet, I pad over behind the bedroom door, another of my dancing partners lithely rolling in my left palm. I don't wait long for the intruder...I smell him long before I see him. The cloying stench of his body odor and the harsh residue of his Turkish tobacco make me gag. Crouching slightly, I wait for him to enter the bedroom. Smiling,



to enter the bedroom. Smiling, the room slows...the silence expands as I feel the thrumming of the metronome in my ears. The interloper's pale shadow angles across the eggshell plaster of the far wall. As the giant enters the room, I need to adjust my stance as he enters. A full two meters in height, he towers over me; fortunately, I don't have to address him to his face. This does, however, make one thing far easier. Stepping behind him and in between his legs, I drive my heel severely into the inside of his shin, smashing into his leg and then down to his instep. The sound of his muscle and tendon transitioning against bone makes a sickening crack on impact. Reaching around him with my right arm at the same time, I cover his mouth against the scream from the shattering of his leg. I pull him back and off his center, gracefully sliding the 20 centimeters of tungsten between his ribs and into his left lung. He screams, biting the middle finger of my right hand. I struggle to hold the Ottoman giant. In his panic, he easily lifts me and then falters. As he tumbles to the floor,

he tosses me across his body and in front of him. My beat has found its mark. The tungsten still wedged in his ribs; he collapses to the floor, gasping for air as his cruel dark eyes dull to ash. The hate drains away swiftly. I hear the gurgle as he drowns in his own blood. Before he expires, I grab him by the shoulders, his arms providing weak protest. I pull him to the closet. The effort of it is incredible, if I had to move him after death, I wouldn't have been able to. As he finishes his waltz, I lift his 120 kilos and roll him face down into the pine box. A snug fit, I reach in and remove my partner from his ribs, the amount of blood minimal as I wipe the blade on his coat. I begin to recite to him his last rights, as the death rattle signals his last breathe. I stop realizing it doesn't matter...a heathen might deserve pity, but not absolution.

Knowing now that someone is aware of me, I quickly secure the impromptu crypt, returning the baseboards and tacking them in place with a few finishing nails. Returning to the bed, and my favorite recitalist, I finish packing. Wiping each piece down with a

light coat of oil, replacing them in the shadow boxes of the custom tool case, I can only admire the rich, dark grain of the stock, so smooth and beautiful. The smoky pitch of the barrel, sleek and ominous, silently reveals its deadly purpose to anyone. I think of my cousin's newborn son and the gentle care I took with his child, smirking, as I realize that I take no less care, as I treat the primary tool of my pursuits.

In all, perhaps fifteen minutes has passed as I return to the wet cobblestone of the dingy side street. Lugging the large chest on its dolly, the wheels make a repetitive clacking on the cobblestone; it reminds me of the train I'm looking to catch and of my metered waltz. The sun is beginning to break after the sudden violent storm, I look up, smiling and laughing...it has been a good day.



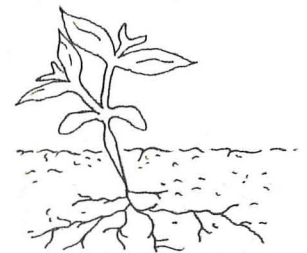
SUNSET

michael fruhner

Selection of Merit

81

The rolling meadow up above
Whose crop of dandelion begins to seed.
A passing broom throws the seeds and breaks the skin,
Bloods seeps forth, smearing the sky.
Now a vision through tempered panes of glass.
Stars emerge from the depths,
The wound slowly congeals.
Now nothing but faint dots in the sky,
The day is now a resting animal.
Harmless, calm, anticipating.
An exhausted world falls to the floor,
Covered in dust and darkness.



THERE IS SOMETHING QUITE DEPRESSING about sitting in a car for hours, watching a door. That's a typical stakeout. A lot of waiting and you can't even distract yourself with a book, because you can't miss a thing. I have no sympathy for cops, though, it's their duty. Try a stakeout when it's not your job and it becomes a whole different conflict. Instead of "I should get paid more for this" it becomes "why the fuck do I give a damn?" On a cold September night with Michigan weather I'd rather be watching TV, but someone decided to make a mistake, and now I have to be the guy to show them the consequences.

As I sit in my shitty Geo Metro, cleverly nicknamed "The Chick Magnet", I try and pry my eyes from the door for a moment. I let myself take in the whole picture. The door is attached to a wall, as most doors are, but this wall happens to be attached to a building. A building where people who believe Hitler had the right idea, like to hang out. Fucking Neo Nazis. I look at myself in the mirror; I put my bottom lip under the top row of teeth and say to myself, "Those damn Jews are ruinin the E-con-o-me!" Damn I'm funny.

I look around the alley way I'm parked in and notice just how little light there is. I can barely make out the silhouettes of the buildings on

this block. I can only see two lights. One is coming from a close-to-burning-out bulb over the door to the Neo Nazi club. The other is 3 blocks down, over a bar called Hogwash. I feel the dryness of my throat and think of getting a drink, but upon further examination of my wallet, I decide against it.

The clock in my car hits twelve. Jesus, it's midnight already, I've been sitting in this car for six hours. Did that old man even give me the right location? Some gut feeling assures me he did. The man knew my name, my situation, everything. A location shouldn't be too hard for him to get right, but holy shit am I bored.

I click on my car radio, and instantly feel my tension release slightly. I can understand now why, in the olden day, we had drummers walk with soldiers. Facing your possible death is a scary thing, and silence always makes fear more paralyzing. Listen to whatever Horror movie soundtrack you want, but the tune in Jaws is nowhere near as scary as complete fucking silence. Whether it's the calm before the storm, the pause before the gunshot, or the response from a repo-man when you ask him how much the bank is taking. Silence is truly the most terrifying of foes.

Unfortunately, this isn't the kind of situation that just an AM radio

can fix. I need to give into my only addiction once again. I search around the junk filled interior of my car, flipping through scraps of old useless papers, reaching under piles of clothes, until finally I find the fruit of my last five dollar bill. Tucked underneath my sleeping bag is my treasure, the cure to stress and anxiety, the good old pack of smokes. Fucking cancer sticks. Sweet cancer sticks. You'll kill me slowly, but you'll make me feel good about it.

Damn things have been killing me slowly since I was sixteen. That's the catch top cigarettes; they pull you in when it's rebellious and cool. Then you're eighteen. It's no longer rebellious, it's not as cool as it was, but fuck it all, you're too addicted to care.

I take notice of an African American woman walking down the same side of the street as the alley I'm parked in. She looks elderly, wearing a ragged jacket from the sixties. She spends her time rummaging through trash cans, pulling out the ten cent treasures society forgot about.

I pull my trusty Zippo out of my pocket, scratched up and worn with a defiant spade emblazoned on the front. For some reason, I've taken a strong liking to this lighter I found on a side-walk. *chink* *flick* *chink* The sound of a Zippo is a tune in itself, it forces a stubborn smile across

Selection of Merit

zachary ostin

REGRET

my face, one of pride in a man's possessions. *My lighter, my car.*

The homeless woman looks up from her searching at the sound of my lighter. Her eyes dart like a gazelle on the savanna, until she spots me. At first I thought she was going to ask me for money, but then she gave me that look. A look only shared by animals on the lower rungs of the food chain. The one that says without words "You may be above me, but we're both a long way from the top" *Shit. The depressing wit of mine kicks in immediately as I utter to myself, "At least I have a car." My subconscious tears down my cockiness: yeah, and that car's got a trunk filled with ten cent treasures. Don't worry, though; you can still beat her to the grocery store to turn them in.*

"I'm a hopeless bastard aren't I?"

Yes, Jack Cooper. Yes you are.

Sometimes I hate my subconscious.

My eyes flicked to the glove box, and I pull out the package concealed within it. A gift from a new friend. *Are you really that desperate for friends, that you'd label him as that?* I look down at the package and let out a heavy breath. "No, not a friend." The package concealed a tool given to me to help me perform a task. A task that, if performed successfully, would get me everything I wanted.

Sounds like a pact with the devil.

"Sometimes, I wonder if it is".

I pull the package apart, first unwinding the thin twine wrapped around it, and then sliding off the light cloth.

The snub-nosed .38 glimmered in the moonlight and felt surprisingly heavy in my hands. I was going to do something bad tonight. I glanced up at the door once again. Eyes sharpening like those of a predator.

What the hell are you doing?

"I really don't know." The last few days had been a blur. Just a week ago I had a pretty standard routine of can-picking, under the table jobs, and scavenging. It was a slow building process of getting back on my feet. Then I suddenly got an opportunity to pass up all the legwork. I just didn't know short cuts were this soulless.

Across the street I notice lights turning off in the Neo Nazi. Some people, none of which I'm interested in, stumble out and head in their respective directions. Closing time is approaching. Time starts acting funny as adrenaline is slowly being introduced to my system. In sixty degree weather, I'm sweating.

Until now, I've been avoiding an important question. However, my subconscious just had to ask it this close to show time.

Can you actually do this?

"I can do this." I mutter to myself.

Sure, you think that. You've seen

enough movies to get it, right? You've watched enough TV that you understand it completely, right?

I know it's not going to be easy, but I have to do it. I can't spend another week collecting cans, I can't spend another day sleeping in this fucking car. "I can't fucking live this way anymore."

"You have to do this, Jack," I tell myself over and over. I look at the .38 and then glance back up at the door. This can't be that hard. Every year thousands of eighteen year olds join the army and do this for a living. If they can do this, I can do this.

The door to the bar opens once more, but this time it means something. Time slows to a crawl. Inch by inch I can feel this moment pressing down on me. As the light slowly spreads from that doorway, my heart slows down, my eyes dilate, my lungs tense, and my legs quietly tremble.

Out of the doorway steps a man that looks like Elvis, if Elvis were a Neo Nazi. His haircut matches the king's exactly. However, his clothes are a different story entirely. His feet were covered with combat boots, which were complemented by slightly new blue jeans. He wore a t-shirt that screamed "FUCK IT ALL" in bright red print, and he covered it just barely with his leather jacket,



covered in enough spikes to make it almost double as a suit of armor.

"Well this should be fun," I mutter.

That's one word for it. You're going to get yourself killed. This is a deal you shouldn't have made.

It's all worth it if I can pull it off.

Even if you pull it off Jack...you still lose.

Mr. Adolph Presley pulls a brown paper bag out of his jacket and begins to take large swigs of what I can rightfully assume is liquor. Suddenly I can't help but think about his past. The horrors he's formerly committed. In that hand I see a bat, not a brown bag. On the ground in front of him I see a young woman screaming for him to please stop. In his eyes I see a lack of conscience. His grin carries a sense of sadistic glee. This is a man who enjoys the misery of others.

"Let's get this bastard," I say as I open my car door.

Last chance to walk away. I'm not interested in walking away, I need this. I need everything that comes with this.

Do you really understand everything that comes with what you are about to do? You're going to get more than you want.

I ignore my subconscious and begin walking across the street. I flick my cigarette towards my car and slowly approach my target. Steps both silent and meaningful.

Vengeance filling my eyes and heart.

This is it. The gun feels even heavier when I pull it out in public. I lift it to the back of Mr. Adolph Presley's head. He stops, I stop, time stops.

We sit in a tense silence for a few moments before he turns around and faces me. He has a look of sheer surprise on his face when he looks at me. His mouth slowly stammers the question, "Who the fuck are you?" I say nothing; I can't work up the courage to say anything. He prods some more, "What, you a cop? Member of some new gang? A fucking serial killer?" Once more, silence is my only response. My eyes start getting watery.

This is not the time or the place for this. I can't focus, my mind is panicking as it realizes what I'm about to do. A shimmer reaches from my brain to my arm, and the gun gets a little shaky.

The target gets impatient. "You just going to sit there with that gun pointed at me? I don't have all fucking night." He takes notice of my watery eyes and lets out a little laugh, "Jesus Christ, you're a family member, aren't you? You knew someone I uh..." He drags his thumb across his neck. "You know in this situation," he begins, "you're pretty fucked."

Stop listening to him, get this over

with.

"If I'm found dead, and the cops start looking around for people. You, whoever you are, are going to be popping up on the motive list real quick. You'll go to jail."

What are you doing? You have to act, now, do this!

"Yeah, that's what I thought," he snickers, "just another fucking coward. Fuck off kid, you don't have the balls to kill me."

Finally my mouth finds words. "Son of a bitch." I cock the hammer and press the barrel against his forehead. His eyes widen severely with the new pressure. "Wrong on both accounts chief," I say. "I don't have any connection to you, I won't spend a second in jail." Silence fills the air, not a sound is heard. "What else am I wrong about?" he asks.

I gladly answer, "I do have the balls to kill you."

Do it.

Killing a man is a strange feeling. The only way I can describe it is by comparing it to cutting the strings of a marionette. One second it's moving, acting out its role in the play of life... and then it just drops. Leaving an absence in its place. A role is no longer fulfilled, the story loses a character, and when you're the one to do it, it's that much harder to deal with. I stared at his ragged body for a second, realizing that I had just

passed judgment. That I had done this horrible deed. That the lady was still there watching.

We made eye contact, and this time I gave her that look. We're still both on the bottom miss. At that moment I knew exactly what her subconscious was thinking, and I dipped my head in shame as I ran for my car. I only faintly heard the words leave her mouth, "live with what you've done."

As I ran to my car I felt the words bear down on me. He was dead and I did it. I killed a man. It couldn't be undone. The car growled to life, and I took off down the road. I killed that man; I shot him in cold blood. I slammed the steering wheel with my fist over and over again.

I told you, you got more out of this than you wanted.

After driving for a few hours I turned down a long driveway lightly concealed with sporadic trees. Once I emerged from the make shift forest, I could see the spacious three story mansion I had been to only once before. I parked in front of it and got out. The massive front door creaked open, and out stepped a large white male in his forties. His nice suit had an obvious bulge where an improvised shoulder holster held an illegally modified shotgun. I tossed him the keys after I made sure I had my lighter.

"I'll need the gun too," he said, "we need to crush it with the car." I pulled out my personal Albatross and handed it to the man. Then I headed inside.

I walked down a short hallway and entered the lounge. A warm but worn room containing old furniture and a fireplace. Above the fire place was a portrait of a smiling young woman, and standing in front of the portrait was an angry old man. Without turning around he asked, "is it done?"

"Yep," I replied without enthusiasm.

When I first met this man, his age was noticeable. It was obvious that death had been pursuing him for awhile. However his hatred kept him alive, and you could see it in his eyes. Little by little, you could see it in this house as well. He walked over to me and put a set of keys in my hand. And closed my hand around them.

Then he slowly began walking toward the door. Thoughts of doubt filled my head. Feelings of self hatred. I was sickened by what I had done this day. *What's done can't be undone.*

"But you can live your whole life regretting it," I whispered to myself.

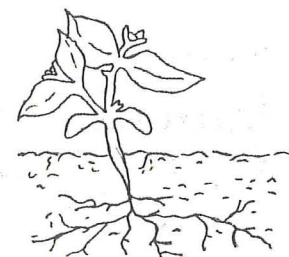
The old man paused. He slowly turned to face me. He took notice of the pathetic impression I was putting across. "It's always hard,"

he said, "doing something the first time. Especially when it's killing. But that bastard deserved it." His own eyes began to water. "He took her from me, he took the only life I had, HE TOOK HER!" He was screaming now. "HE DOESN'T DESERVE LIFE IF SHE COULDN'T HAVE IT!" His eyes were small streams by now. He had a brief moment of self reflection, and put on his coat. He was ashamed of the rage he just showed, but at the same time, he stubbornly defended it.

He gave me one last arrogant shameful glance, and stormed out. I was now alone, in my newly acquired home, with my newly acquired fortune. I could spend the rest of my life sleeping in an actual bed, eating decent food, and washing myself in an actual shower. I began to smile a little.

I glanced over at a mirror and the smile suddenly and viscously ripped away as I looked into my own eyes. I didn't see me anymore, I saw a murderer.

I had a home now.
But at what cost?



The melody of time is in the sky.
The stars, the moon, the everglow,
Play tricks to distant eyes and mind.
The echo beckons every sense in an endless beat of time,
Combining light and darkness in an ever playful rhyme.

Selection of Merit

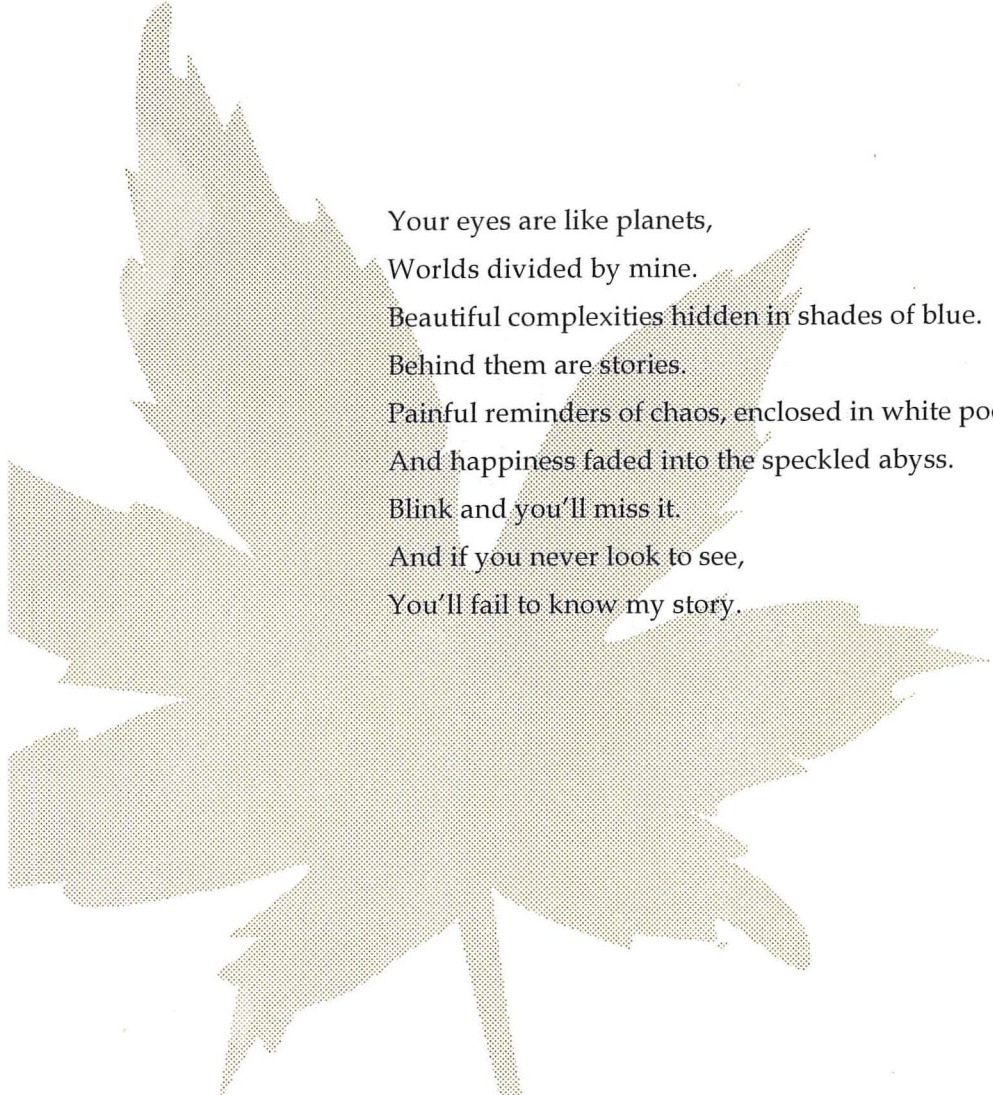
lauren cross
SHADOWS



IRIS

lauren cross

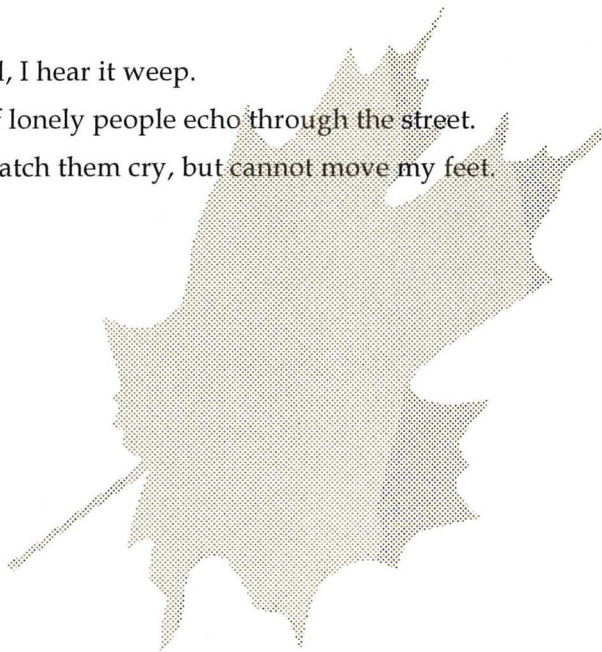
Selection of Merit



Your eyes are like planets,
Worlds divided by mine.
Beautiful complexities hidden in shades of blue.
Behind them are stories.
Painful reminders of chaos, enclosed in white pools,
And happiness faded into the speckled abyss.
Blink and you'll miss it.
And if you never look to see,
You'll fail to know my story.



The city's cold, I hear it weep.
The sounds of lonely people echo through the street.
By and by I watch them cry, but cannot move my feet.



Selection of Merit

lauren cross
ECHO

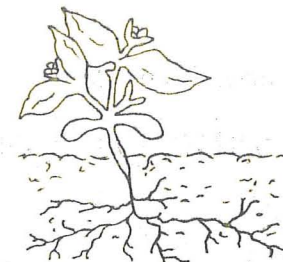
TATTOOED

adrienne reamer

Selection of Merit

89

Crosses, animals, astronomy signs,
names and portraits of loved ones.
Put on under the skin,
with the rapid rhythmic rapping of the needles
Untouched skin pierced with a blemish of ink,
like a virgin being touched for the first time
Waiting with anticipation like a climax of an orgasm
Breathing through the pain like Lamaze
Sore and swollen after words
Pain forgotten
Addicted



"Do you think I could skip it with my left hand?"
I didn't, nor did I share such negativity

We sat beside the pond: artificial, murky, trash-infested
His right arm wrapped, my attention elsewhere.
Beneath a dying canopy, fanning orange and brown
Barely reflected in stagnant water and casting sparse shade upon us
We idled, passing the chill autumn day in near silence
Me, regretting the dreariness of his birthday
Him, cherishing companionship – a scarce privilege

"Why... does everything always happen to me?"
An inquiry I could never answer to satisfaction.

I said nothing and watched his head drop with a sigh
My fingers curled amongst dry foliage, clawing at toxic soil
Copper flooded my tongue, alerting me to relinquish my own lip
I yearned for more small-talk, from which I had been absolved
I cursed my absent-minded reverie and failure to recover in time

Selection of Merit

sabelyn thorpe

SEVENTEEN

"Maybe Dad is right. Maybe I do deserve it..."

The depression and self-loathing of a tortured adolescent

Despite my efforts, I could not expel it or reverse the damage

Still, he anticipated a reply, something I now grasped for

Wondered what I had not said a thousand times before

Gray eyes mirrored ashen clouds, both sets promising rain

A miserable downpour only I could staunch

So, with a coerced smile and a jab to his ribs, I played my part



AS ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY BRING newer and better electronics to us every year, the computer equipment that many Americans rely on to do their jobs, run their businesses, and stay connected to family and friends becomes outdated at an ever-increasing pace. But when last year's newest, greatest thing turns into this year's outdated relic, we have limited options as we search for ways to handle the garbage left behind. Reports about recyclers who illegally ship obsolete equipment overseas to be handled by poor, untrained workers leave many Americans wondering where to turn. More strict laws should be enacted and enforced to require recycling companies to accurately identify where and how recycled electronics will be handled. In addition, more severe penalties should be implemented to prevent unscrupulous business owners from illegally shipping electronic waste anywhere in the world that does not use safe recycling processes.

The 60 Minutes report, "Electronic Wasteland," demonstrates that people in the United States hoping to recycle their outdated electronic equipment, or e-waste, in a responsible manner can't always be certain where their discarded items will actually end up. Correspondent Scott Pelley notes that a large portion of e-waste, including cathode ray tube, or CRT, monitors and televisions, is illegally shipped from the United States and other developed nations to third-world countries that

use primitive methods to extract the precious metals and chips inside. As the report reveals, these underground operations are poisoning the people, land, air, and water in places such as Guiyu, China, which the report calls "one of the most polluted places on earth."

When Pelley speaks with Alan Hershkowitz, a senior scientist and authority on waste management for the Natural Resources Defense Council for the report, Hershkowitz states that e-waste is the "fastest growing component of the municipal waste stream, worldwide." The in-depth report includes footage of Pelley traveling with Jim Puckett, founder of Basel Action Network (BAN), to the dumps of Guiyu, China where they show aerial views of what Pelley describes as "acres of computer monitors." On the ground, in video attributed to Greenpeace, viewers see large piles of smoldering computer components and women heating circuit boards over open flames, as Pelley describes how they melt the lead solder in order to get to the copper and other valuable components.

As Hershkowitz points out, CRTs contain a variety of dangerous components including mercury, lead, cadmium and chromium. Workers in Guiyu dismantle these monitors without any of the proper safety equipment and training that would be required in a recycling facility in the U.S. According to Hershkowitz,

this is basically "21st Century toxins being managed in a 17th century environment." Pelley remarks that scientists have found "the highest levels of cancer-causing dioxins in the world" in this area. As a result of the dangerous levels of toxins these workers are exposed to, they can suffer from chemical burns, brain damage, kidney disease, and cancers. Due to the extremely high levels of pollutants in the environment all around them, it is not safe to drink the water or breathe the air, even for the men, women, and children who do not work in the recycling yard.

Recyclers are willing to violate domestic and international laws to send this e-waste to places like Guiyu because it is often more profitable to sell the waste to places where workers will accept low wages and not insist on established safety precautions than it is to have the products recycled in the U.S. To illustrate the willingness of some American companies to mislead their customers and illegally ship e-waste overseas in the interest of higher profits, the report shows people in Denver bringing used electronics, including CRT monitors and televisions, to a recycling drive held by Executive Recycling of Englewood, Colorado. The company's policy, as stated on their website and shown in the report, clearly states that the items collected will be recycled "properly, right here in the U.S.—not simply dumped on somebody else."

Selection of Merit

karen deschaine

RECYCLING DILEMMAS

Executive Recycling's CEO, Brandon Richter, is briefly interviewed about the problems related to sending e-waste overseas. He explains that because the overseas companies don't have the proper equipment to handle this type of waste, it creates safety hazards for the workers. A consumer relying on the company's published policy and the CEO's compassionate recognition of the problems that exist in overseas recycling operations is lead to believe their e-waste will not end up in such a place. However, the report then follows a shipping container from Executive Recycling in Colorado through a port in Tacoma, Washington and finally on to Hong Kong. Although that particular container is ultimately returned by officials in Hong Kong to Executive Recycling, when Richter is confronted by the 60 Minutes correspondent with proof that this illegal shipment originated from his facility, he acknowledges that such a shipment would be illegal, but adamantly denies responsibility. Pelley then cites a report of a sting by the Federal Government Accountability Office where they found a total of 43 American recycling companies, including Executive Recycling in Colorado, willing to sell CRT computer monitors and televisions to a fictitious broker in Hong Kong in clear violation of domestic and international law. In other words, even as Richter expressed what appeared to be genuine concern for Asian workers, he was, in fact, illegally exporting toxins

that would ultimately be dumped on them.

While the effects of e-waste handling in China are particularly disturbing, the consequences of not recycling these items at all are no more appealing. According to "The Problem with Electronics Most E-Waste is Trashed, Not Recycled," a report on ComputerTakeback.com, of the more than 3 million tons of used, outdated electronic equipment that was generated in the U.S. in 2007, less than 14% was recycled. The 86% that was not recycled went to landfills in the U.S. with no hope of decomposing any time in the near future. When e-waste ends up in our landfills, hazardous chemicals are left to ooze into the groundwater where they release poisons that endanger plants, animals and people in the surrounding area. This type of pollution can lead to unacceptably high levels of cancer causing dioxins in our own communities, just as it has done in Guiyu, China.

Clearly, a lot of work remains to be done in the U.S. to increase the amount of e-waste being turned in for recycling, but as ComputerTakeback.com also notes, of the small percentage of e-waste that was recycled, 50 to 80% of it was shipped overseas for dismantling. Americans are faced with very few choices when they search for any company willing to take these items back, and when so many companies are willing to deceive the public in their pursuit of higher profits,

it is even more difficult to be sure about what will be done with the items once they are turned in. Until American consumers can be assured that their discarded products will be recycled using safe and modern methods, it will be difficult to convince them to stop simply throwing them out in the trash.

Consumers should demand that recycling companies clearly explain what will be done with the e-waste they accept. That, along with worldwide strict and consistent law enforcement, would provide some level of confidence for people hoping to recycle these items in a responsible manner. When stronger laws are combined with harsh penalties, including extended jail time for company officials and hefty fines that outweigh the profits that can be made by sending these materials overseas, I am confident that more people will seek out responsible recyclers in greater numbers. The end result will be a significantly reduced amount of toxins being released into the environment, providing safer and healthier communities around the world.

Works Cited

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 "The Problem With Electronics Most E-Waste is Trashed, Not Recycled." April, 6, 2010.



"...HUNNY I REALLY HAVE TO GO, it's...11:51! I have to be to work in nine minutes!"

"Okay, then. Have a good night at work. Bye."

My girlfriend watched me frantically run out the door to my car. As I turned my key in the ignition, I saw the clock, 11:52—only eight more minutes! Pulling out of her long driveway seemed to take an eternity. Shifting into drive and heading down Atkins road, I prayed and hoped that there was no traffic. It was almost midnight, so it was dark and the streets mostly bare. I floored it! Turning on to Range, I started to really get moving; it was a straight away and the clock just struck 11:53. Turning my music up seemed to help speed me, as though it were a part of my drive train, adding horsepower with each beat. I came to the intersection of Range and West Water, where there is a jog in the road to the right; I slowed down, but didn't entirely stop. I saw nothing on my left and some lights to my right, but I was certain that they were farther than they actually were. So I went. As soon as my foot hit the gas, I knew that I was wrong in my assumption.... (To be continued)

The majority of people in this generation have so many things to

do, so many people to see, and so little time to spend driving safely. This fast-paced society makes it very difficult for many to make time to drive safely, or to get proper sleep to be alert enough to drive safely.

My father, for example, is quite busy with work and he also trains in martial arts. One day, after he got out of work, he was on his way to Detroit to train, and he fell asleep at the wheel. It was just before the 23 Mile Road exit on I-94. When he opened his eyes, the Chevy Suburban that was in front of him was stopping; to avoid collision, he swerved to the right which took him off of the road. His Envoy carried him air borne over a ditch, through a fence and through three back yards. My father was extremely blessed that there were no children out swinging, playing tag, or playing catch that day. He totaled his SUV. There was grass and dirt lodged into every crevice on the outside of his car. When I received the call, I dropped everything I was doing and left to pick him up as fast as I could. He looked totally fine on the outside, but on the inside in total shock. My step-mother and I took him over to the emergency room, and everything checked out okay. According to VicRoads

Road Accident Facts Victoria, 1998 edition, "About thirty percent of severe single vehicle crashes in rural areas involve the driver being fatigued." ("Fatigue Statistics." www.tacsaftey.com N.P. N.D. Web. 7 Sept. 2010)

I also have had much experience with being fatigued and driving. I work from 12:00 AM to 8:00 AM Monday through Sunday. There have been numerous times when I had not slept at all before work, so I had to drive home being extremely exhausted. I remember a particularly scary ride home that happened earlier this summer. There was construction on the main road I was taking; the construction workers were directing traffic, and we were stopped. While we were stopped, I put my car into park, relaxed, and fell asleep almost instantaneously. The next thing that I remember was opening my eyes, not seeing any cars in front of me, and hearing the honking of cars from behind me. This was quite embarrassing, and it could have been disastrous if I was in motion like my father was.

I can recall a more recent incident that is even more frightening. I was driving home from a music rehearsal I had in Oakland. It was about 11:30 at night, and I had not slept since the previous day, so I

Selection of Merit

john e. dasharion jr.

COMING TOO CLOSE

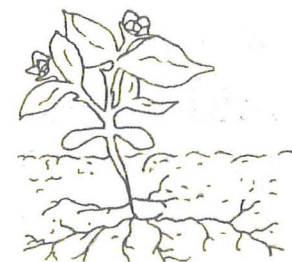
had been awake for over 24 hours. I sleepily headed for my car. Like an aged warrior going into battle, I dreaded the war ahead of me. I was completely exhausted. As I turned the wheel and began to drive, I soon realized that I may not make it the whole way if I wanted to make it in one piece. It was just as late as I would normally drive, but my fatigue seemed to make the darkness thicker and heavier. I had a long way ahead of me; Oakland is an hour and fifteen minutes away from home. The sound of the wind rushing past my window turned into a soothing whisper in my ear, and the hum of my engine a lullaby that would sing me to sleep. It took about thirty minutes or so to get to the freeway, and by that time I was ready to collapse. Wishing that I had a device that could just teleport me home, I pulled into the Meijer's that was right next to the freeway. I did not feel like ending my life that night, so I decided a nap might help. I set an alarm to wake me up in about thirty minutes, but my body demanded more. I slept for about an hour and a half in the Meijer's parking lot that night. I wish that I could say that the long nap I took had helped, but it only made my body long for slumber even more. Challenging the freeway was not something I

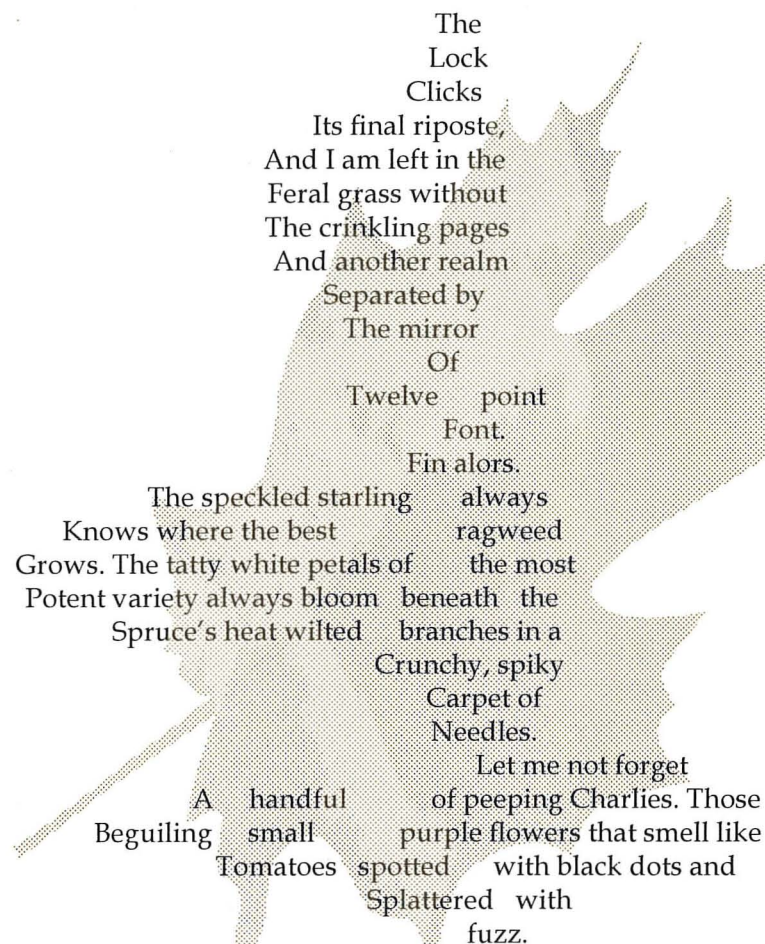
wanted to do, lest it overtake me. Fortunately for me, I won. The next day when I woke up I could not entirely recall the details from the trip. All that I could remember was sleeping in Meijer's parking lot and pulling in my driveway; everything else was a blur. There have been so many times that I have made poor choices when driving, but God, so graciously, has always protected me.

...Just a second after I stepped on the gas I could hear tires squealing. I was engulfed with light as the truck moved closer. I swerved to the left to offset impact. Before I could have a second thought, the light was gone, and I was on my way further down Range Road. Reaching speeds I knew I shouldn't, my car sped across the asphalt like a cheetah. I looked in my rearview mirror to see the truck that I almost exchanged paint with turning around and coming after me. I was scared out of my wits. "I know I didn't hit him. Why is he chasing me??" I asked myself. He chased me as I sped; I was not running FROM him, but running TO work. Blazing down the road topping speeds of 100 mph, he started to pass me. As he pulled up next to me, I decided to put an end to this craziness, and I pulled over, my heart nearly pounding

out of my chest in fear. I got out of my car and walked back to his. While he was hurling insults and numerous profanities at me, I asked him if I had hit him, because that was my main concern, and he said no. He was much larger than me, and I was very afraid, but he did not try to hurt me. He was extremely angry, though, because I had put both of our lives in danger. He explained that he didn't want to have to read about my death in the paper because I was in a hurry into work and got killed in a car accident. I was almost in tears because of the embarrassment and guilt. I knew better, and I apologized again and again. Though still upset, he told me to leave; I got in my car and left. That night will forever remain with me as the night I came too close.

I never want to be that close again, and I never want anyone to be that close. Living in a society in which agenda out-ranks all, it's easy to forget how important life is. Life is the most precious gift that we have, and for it to be thrown away for such a petty thing as not getting enough sleep, or trying to be on time for work, would be unspeakable. An old Irish proverb says "God made man, but man made haste."





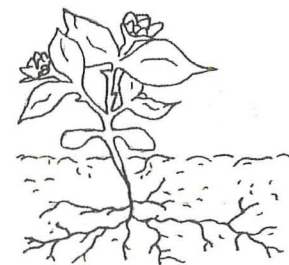
The
 Lock
 Clicks
 Its final riposte,
 And I am left in the
 Feral grass without
 The crinkling pages
 And another realm
 Separated by
 The mirror
 Of
 Twelve point
 Font.
 Fin alors.
 The speckled starling always
 Knows where the best ragweed
 Grows. The tatty white petals of the most
 Potent variety always bloom beneath the
 Spruce's heat wilted branches in a
 Crunchy, spiky
 Carpet of
 Needles.
 Let me not forget
 A handful of peeping Charlies. Those
 Beguiling small purple flowers that smell like
 Tomatoes spotted with black dots and
 Splattered with
 fuzz.

Selection of Merit

nikki roulo

WITCH GIRL

	Fabricated	Four
	Look	daisy
		a-likes,
Three spider vines	of	small
Yellow flowers,	two plants that	
Make my fingers	itch	with
Red dots, one	earwig	to
Twine around	the	stems.
The door		
	Unfastens	
Itself at my	appeal.	
A laugh	levitates,	
Restrained by will until	it explodes	
At the sound of the sneezing,	the	
Salt stream dribbling down	from eyes shut tight.	
And I— well, I slip inside	and race	
Up the stairs to my	book while	
You, queen,	still	
Clasping	my witch's	
	Brew	
	Sneeze	
	Again.	



Freedom is Sprite spray
When the can is opened.
Orders are the grains of niveous sand
Rubbing between sandal leather and skin.
Adults rolling their eyes are sand paper
Rasping against patience.
Eighteen is the portal
With the amber light behind it.

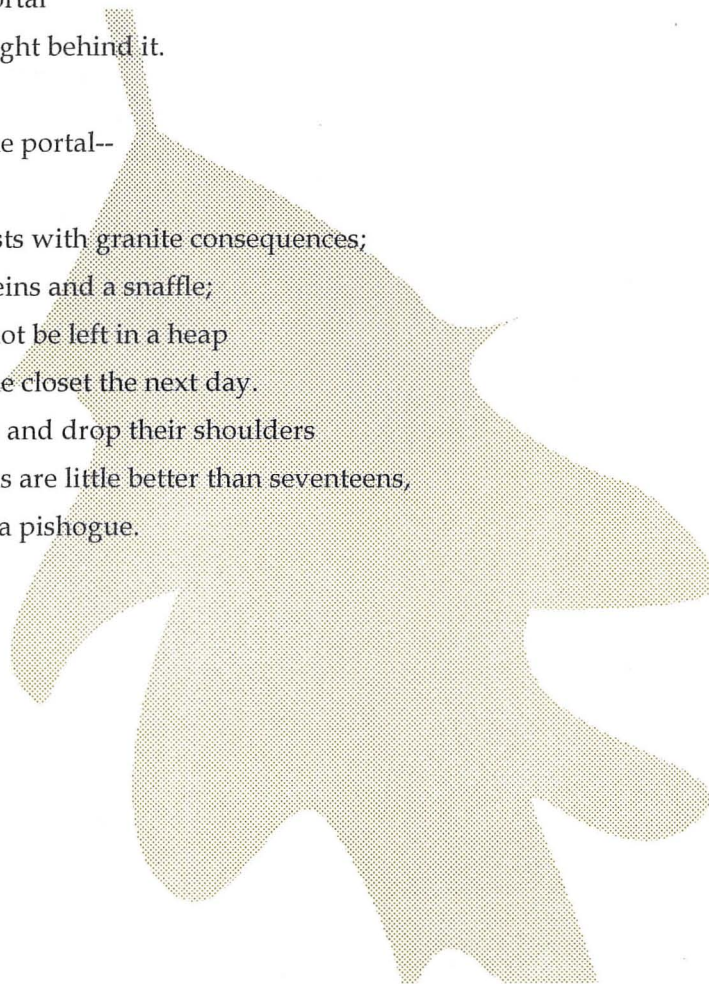
But... through the portal--

Orders are requests with granite consequences;
Bills are leather reins and a snaffle;
The laundry cannot be left in a heap
And appear in the closet the next day.
Adults shift aside and drop their shoulders
Because eighteens are little better than seventeens,
And the portal is a pishogue.

Selection of Merit

nikki rulo

THE PORTAL



LUST

zachary ostin

Selection of Merit

99

Clothes like wax paper, hiding the sweetness inside.
Your sashay refuses to describe your flavor,
leaving me with nothing more than a question mark.
Hormones controlling my thoughts like sugar controls a child.
My mind focuses on what awaits inside your wrapper.
What is the identity of your mystery flavor?
My mouth salivates as your aroma clues me in.
Every noise of your unwrapping induces my lust.
Driven closer by the sight of your captivating color.
I get close,
Close enough to touch, to taste,
Mind stopping, reveling in this moment.



Leo, his name alluding power, respect
Power to incite, teach, nurture...
Possessing talents, experience, knowledge, inspiring
Childish reverie
Drawing cartoon armies across battlefields of drywall
Contemplating stories of the Odyssey and Treasure Island
Adult pursuits,
Shakespearean sonnets, late night expositions into physics
Stained glass windows stirring audiences in beauty
Light cascading through...
Talents devoted crafting wine and spirits
A mischievous delight in his eyes
The patinated copper flame leaping from the spark of a Diamond match
A dancing luminescence from his "double distilled"
Licking, prancing, breathing, a djinn surfacing on the spoon
Simple letters in the absence, reconnecting...
To a seven year old abandoned boy

Selection of Merit

darrin r. rushing

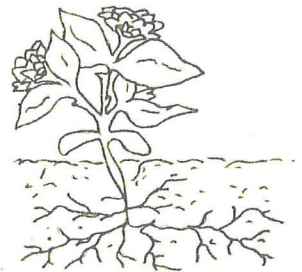
REFLECTIONS OF RENAISSANCE

APPLE PIE

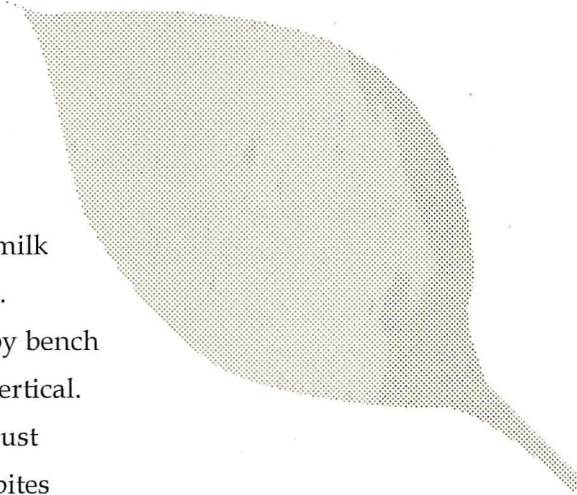
darrin r. rushing

Selection of Merit

Your hands were always firm, but gentle
Teaching kindness even when I was temperamental
Coaxing, prodding, side by side, your hands on mine
Pouring flour, cutting lard, sprinkling sugar
Lessons of life, one ingredient at a time
Whisking, needing knowledge
Blending wisdom with each new spice
Apple selecting, finding the pulp firm and tart
Slices of life almost never so sweet
The sharp zest of ginger, nutmeg and allspice
Wedding with the smoky cinnamon
Life so complicated, yet so simple
Kneading one ingredient at a time with firm, gentle hands
The aroma of time well spent, wafting through the air



The body seized. Enough!
He collapsed in the park
Near a rusted fence; caged.
As night unfolded
Green tree leaves
And gray dirt
Helped camouflage
The cadaverous body.
Consciousness came
With odors of soured milk
And fermented cheese.
Steel legs from a nearby bench
Aided his balance to vertical.
He choked away the dust
From his throat. Bug bites
Covered his body; Ants
Continued to eat his skin
With cannibalistic fervor.
Shamed, he starts for home.
Funny, the word "smack."
A drug?
Or the sound of sobriety
Hitting the floor?



Selection of Merit

colleen ryan
ADDICTION

THE LEFTOVER MOVEMENT

103

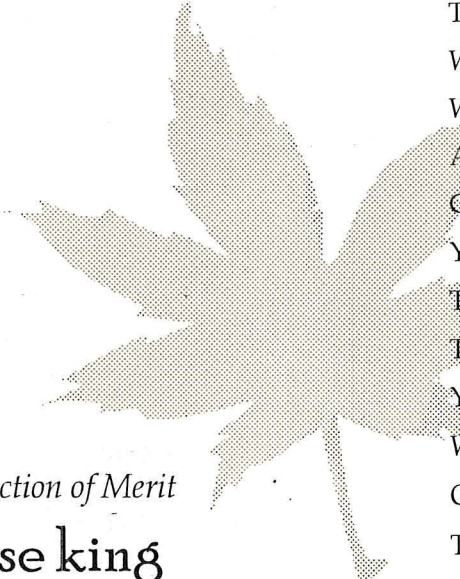
colleen ryan

Selection of Merit

A day is like a dinner plate;
If work isn't finished,
We wrap it in foil
Until the next day,
When we wake to light.
Peeling ourselves from bathrobes,
Just as we unwrap leftovers,
We walk out the door
Not looking in the mirror.
Reflection is like meatloaf:
Recipe? Memorized!
No need to check.
This is a monotonous menu!
Let us scrape our plates
Into the garbage can;
Let us broaden our palettes;
Refuse the leftovers.
Let us order carry out
From the Thai Palace
And prepare our taste buds
For the five-alarm heat.



You stand sculpted and draped in copper
Beneath the Blue Water International Bridge
A small town boy making his way
Walking forward, wearing your hat
I run past you, like the trains
You wrote and sold newspapers on
Back and forth from Port Huron
To Big Motor City Detroit
Little schooling to mold your mind
Into the shape of everyone else's
The phonograph creator
And you were partially deaf
The electric chair invention
Whose purpose you didn't support
Your patented stenciled pens
Tattoo artists use to engrave
While extracting iron from ore
Wasn't practical you found
And people didn't buy
Concrete houses that you built
You still keep pushing on
Till ideas took fire and stuck
Thomas Alva Edison
You keep me running
When there's no steam left
Only the same hours you had
To light up a day



Selection of Merit

rose king

THOMAS EDISON STATUE

WEDDING IN A PARK

elizabeth anderson

Selection of Merit

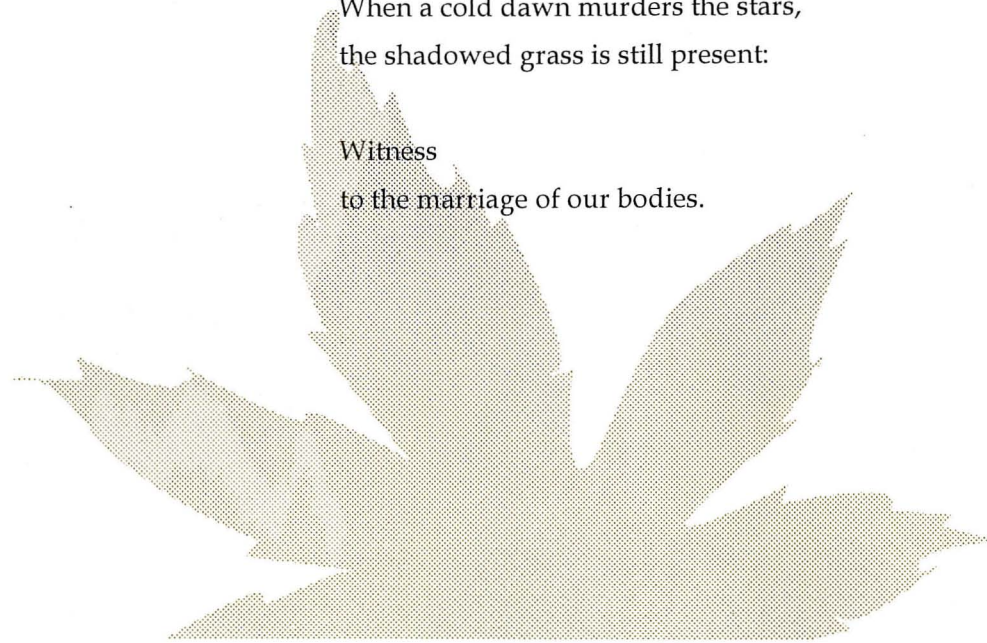
105

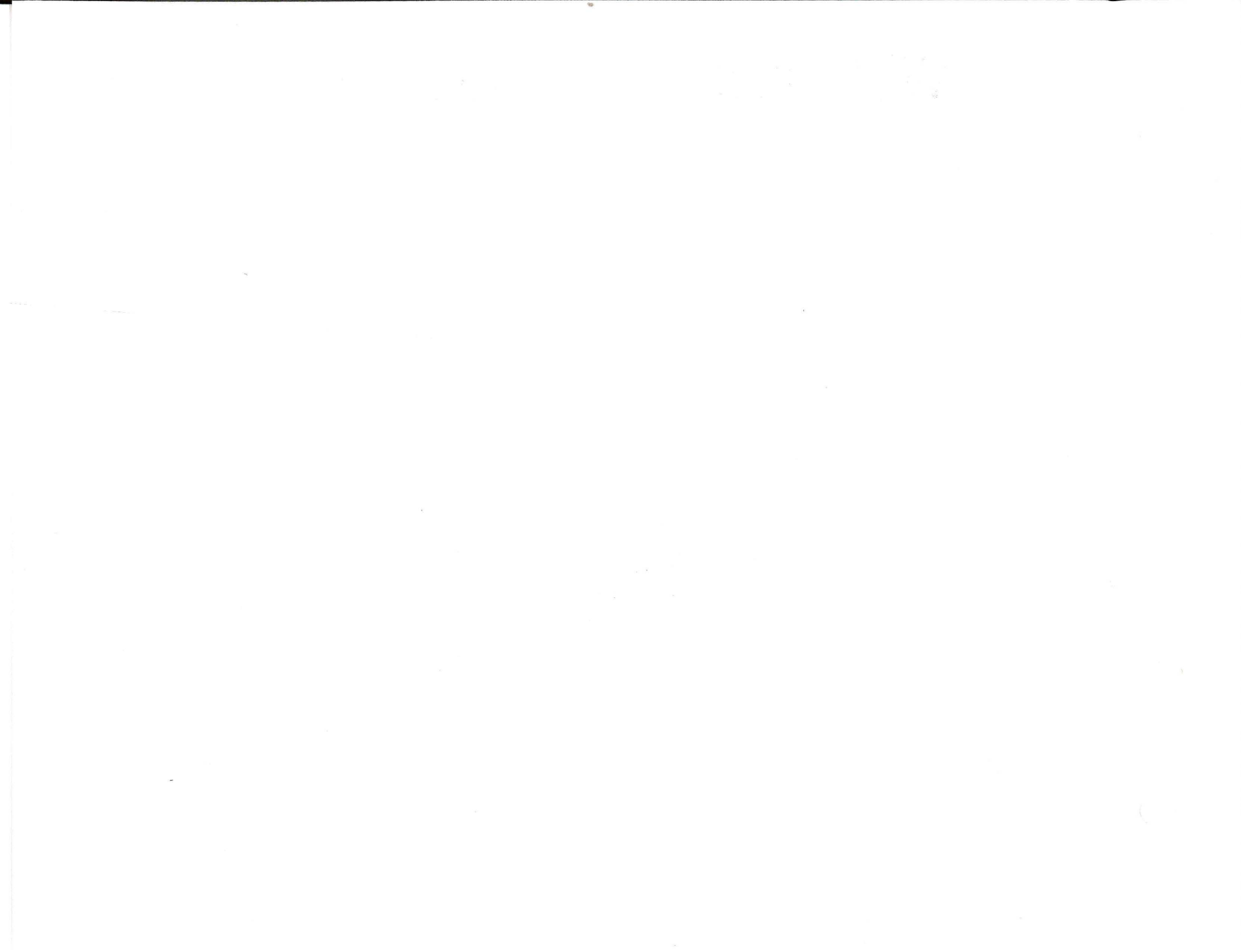
Grass is in the service of love,
a downy bed to cradle our bodies
as we roll down the hill together,
laughing,
and cling to kiss:

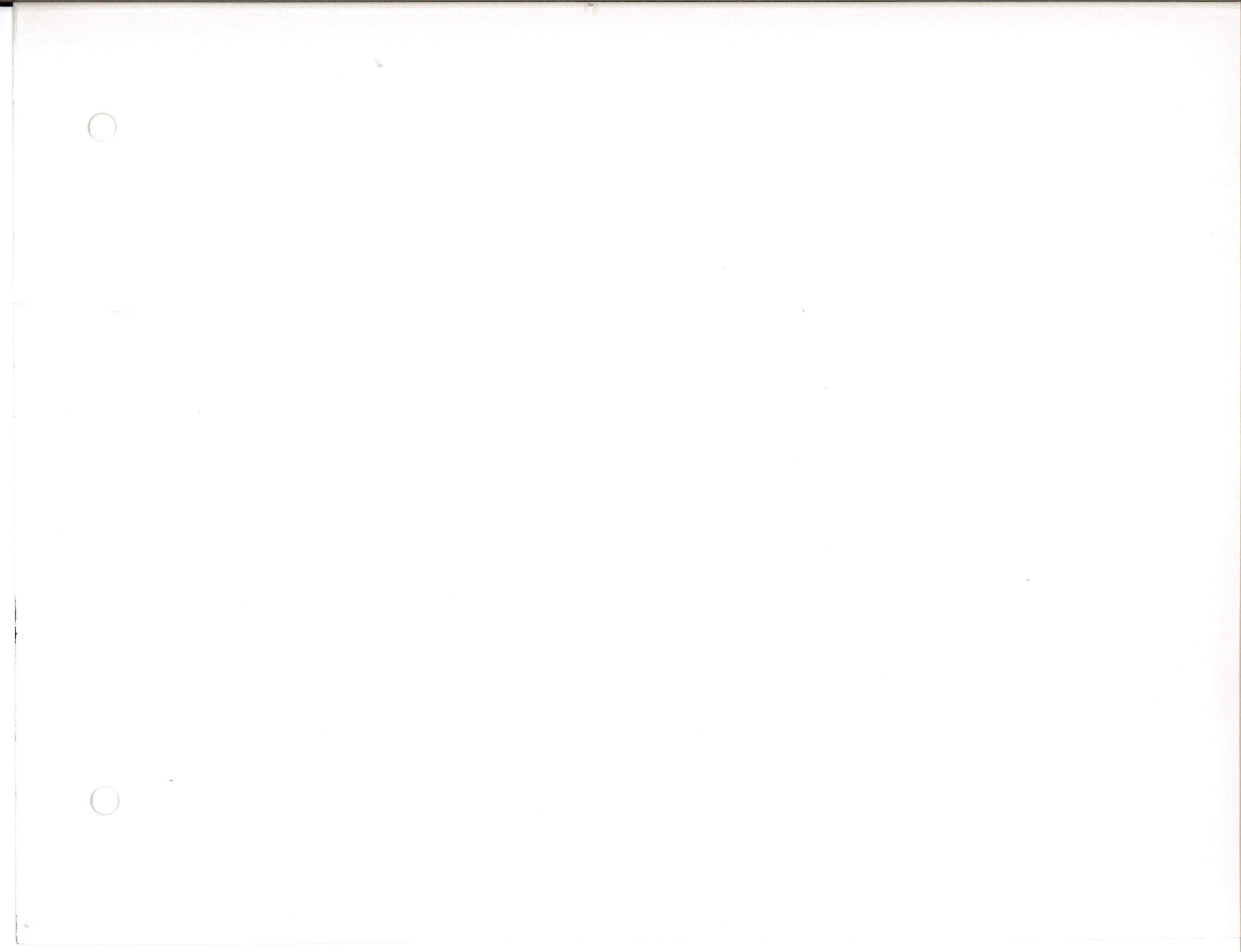
The ritual of love-making.

When a cold dawn murders the stars,
the shadowed grass is still present:

Witness
to the marriage of our bodies.









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